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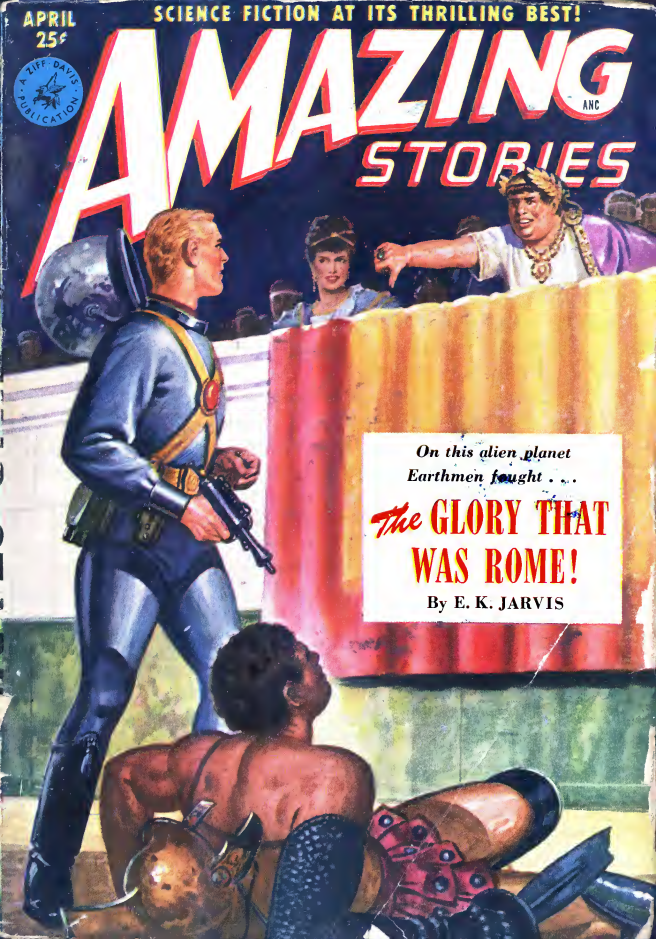


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By E. K. JARVIS



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Front cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones, illustrating
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The

OBSERVATORY

..... by the Editor

A DAY or two ago a manuscript came in from Bill McGivern—and along with it a letter which has sent us around with an itchy foot ever since—plus giving us plenty to think about on the present world situation.

THE "ITCHY FOOT" part came in with his very first paragraph: "This story was started in Paris, advanced in Frankfurt, whipped up to a climax in Berlin and finished here in Nurnberg." To us, who've always wanted (in theory, anyway) to take off for Outer Mongolia or Tierra del Fuego, those words succeeded in "ruining what had started out to be a nice day. Not that we haven't been around, you understand—having covered practically every mile between the stucco-bound coast of California and the "stuck-o" shores of New York City. (We've got to stop hanging around Rog Phillips!) But the lure of distant places remains unfulfilled—and we ask our writers to please keep that in mind when sending letters!

AS FOR the present world situation—and we hasten to say that we have no panaceas to cure it, no words of wisdom to direct at those now engaged in trying to bring some semblance of order to a confused and nervous humanity—let us quote again from McGivern's letter:

"THE GERMAN problem, if I may briefly dazzle you with my new international perspective, is as full of angles as a mystery novel, but without a last chapter solution. The younger people seem cured of any militaristic bent, yet circumstances seem to be forcing them back into some kind of an army. The unemployment and general low standards here are their main concern, and they look upon a non-productive static army as being only exceeded in horror by a non-static army. We have bewildered them with our changes in alliances over the past five years, and many of them, while liking us in theory, feel slightly leery about the sincerity and determination in a European defense."


WHICH concludes our first—and final!—attempt in these pages to usurp the duties of a news magazine. But

Bill's one of your—and our—favorite writers, and we think you'll be interested in what he's doing and thinking.

INCIDENTALLY, in case you're wondering what the guy's doing so far from Joe's Beanery, he and his wife are on their way, by easy stages, to Italy for a year. Seems he's got a couple of books to write, as has Mrs. McGivern, who reportedly has some talent along similar lines. All this only goes to show that writers are the most fortunate of all people. Of course, everyone knows that—except writers.

ORDINARILY this column is not given over to reviewing books or the movies. But in recent weeks of reading and movie going, we've come across a couple of items that are sure to go over big with readers of science-fiction. The first was Philip Wylie's "The Disappearance"—a combination of fantasy and science-fiction that will keep you up all night unless you're made of sterner stuff than we are. The gimmick is this: one afternoon every woman on earth disappeared! Only (and this may seem a little involved, which is our fault and not Mr. Wylie's) it seemed to the women that the men had disappeared, leaving only the women! Actually, earth had become like two worlds in the same plane, each non-existent to the other, one populated only with women and the other only with men. All else remained as it was before, except that everything, right down to the tiniest blade of grass was duplicated on both "earths". What the men did with their world and what the women did with theirs make up the balance of the novel. Put it on your "must" list, for it has action, drama, humor and pathos—plus the flair for pungent observations on human frailties for which Wylie has become famous—or, to some, infamous....

THE MOVIE is an English job titled "Seven Days to Noon". An idealistic but probably misguided scientist has disappeared with a bomb far more deadly than the atom kind—and is somewhere in London lugging the thing around in a suitcase. He has given the Government seven days to cease manufacturing such things for war purposes—or he'll blow up the heart of the city! This is so good you'll forget to eat your popcorn! —HB



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A SHORT NOVEL BY E. K. JARVIS

On a distant world another Nero built
Rome back to power. But how can any-
one expect to make a liar out of history?

The GLORY THAT



WAS ROME!

WOLF HALLORAN cursed. He looked up the gaudily lit street and spoke to no one in particular: "Where in hell," he asked, "can that damn drunken Swede be hiding out?"

A fur-clad, poison-tailed Plutonian was sprawled on the sidewalk in front of Wolf. The Plutonian opened one eye, hissed softly, but with menace, and then revealed a set of white, razor-sharp teeth. Without a downward glance, Wolf stepped over the bulk to go on his way.

But the Plutonian's long, muscular tail—to all purposes a third arm—snaked out and wrapped itself around Wolf Halloran's ankle. Wolf swore again, whirled, and reached for the short knife on his hip.

The Plutonian laughed. "Not so fast, Wolf. Would you leave a friend lying in the gutter without a coin in his pocket?"

Wolf turned back to peer down at the Plutonian. Then, with a fresh curse, he caught the man by the furry scruff of his neck and hauled him erect. "Damn you, Latsos! Damn you and all the rest of my flea-bitten crummy crew! On your feet and fast! There's hell to pay!"

"What's the trouble, Wolf?"

"Trouble? Can't you hear those guns? Can't you see the barrage up there? Ramed's war fleet is standing off two thousand miles. Where the hell is Lars Anson? We've got to get the crew together quick!"

The Plutonian's green eyes opened wide. "Great Gan! You mean it's come? And our ship—"

"I know where our ship is! I want a crew!"

Latsos took Wolf Halloran by the arm and started off with long cat-like strides. "This way! A whiskey house up the street. They threw me out an hour ago, but Lars and some of the others should still be there."

"Lead the way!" Wolf snapped, and gave the Plutonian a shove that almost sent him sprawling.

He was furious, this huge dark-faced spaceman; in a seething rage at the time he'd lost. Only five hours before, he'd brought his big freighter to berth at the Chicago Space Port. And he'd spent the last three of those hours trying to round up his crew here in the Interplanetary Settlement.

One of the hell-holes of the Universe, the settlement: an area set aside like a plague spot, a sink-hole that catered to creatures of every planet, satisfied every appetite no matter how abnormal or grotesque.

His anxiety and anger mounting, Wolf had traveled from one sink-hole to another: into the whiskey houses where raw fire was for sale at so much a cup, into the drug dens where a man could be a king of phantom worlds for a few dollars, into the flesh houses, where hot-blooded Venusian maidens practised their ecstasies on all comers who had the price.

Hour after hour, Wolf had hunted, while all over Earth, the population was diving like so many rats into bomb-shelters, the rock-walled bastions underground where they would have a fifty-fifty chance of survival.

But not in the Interplanetary Settlement. The men and women who haunted this cesspool were too full of contempt for even life itself to bother. They wouldn't hide from the devil and all his legions, let alone a puny warlord like Ramed who had come merely to blow up a planet. Steeped in vice, they would have one more drink, one more dream, one more hot Venusian body before hell broke loose.

But then they would fight. Their attitude was one of insolence rather than laziness, contempt rather than fear; and God help the mop-up squads of Ramed when they poked their noses

into this muck-hole to clean out the vermin!

All this, Wolf Halloran knew as he followed Latsos the Plutonian up the street. But it gave him scant comfort because he was not of an inclination to squat here and await destruction. He had a tremendous investment in the big space freighter berthed nearby waiting to be smashed. He cursed anew as Latsos came abreast of a purple-lit entrance and said, "You go in first. I'll follow. They may not take kindly to my return."

WOLF THREW open the door and strode inside. The place was invitingly dim and the burly Martian proprietor not uncordial as he approached Wolf. But the latter ignored him and roared out, "Lars! Lars Anson, you dirty dog! Front and center or I'll break your back with my two hands!"

The Martian scowled. "We'll have no rough-house here, my friend—"

Wolf was at the breaking point, the Martian unfortunate in that he was a logical target of pentup wrath.

Wolf hit him.

The Martian's eyes went vacant. He rode backward on his heels until the edge of the bar caught him across the small of his back. He went over it in an arc to crash down behind it, his feet smashing the mirror to bring down a rain of glass.

Latsos grinned. "That will teach you to mind your manners, barkeep."

"Shut up!" Wolf roared. "Get them out here! Lars Anson!"

A great shock of yellow hair appeared in a doorway nearby. There was a huge head beneath it, set on a pair of shoulders that almost matched Wolf's own; an amiable grin on the face even as Wolf thundered again:

"Get your crew together, you Swedish rum-pot!"

"Sure, Lars—sure. We jetting off so soon?"

Other forms appeared now from other doorways: the four-armed Mercurians, fighter of which there was no peer; the soft skinned, Neptunian birdmen who loved motors and things mechanical; the Martians who could bend steel bars before they were weaned of their mother's milk.

Even at this hard-pressed moment Wolf Halloran felt a glow of pride as he watched them assemble. Here was a crew to warm a spaceman's heart. A cordon of lusty jacks who could take a ship into the darkest plane-toids, even among the crawling creatures of the little worlds, and bring out rare treasure.

"We're jetting off *now*," Wolf bel-lowed. "If we aren't too late!"

At that instant the building rocked. The air about them was suddenly charged with pure, white light; every eye in the place was closed against the brilliance, every ear tortured by the splitting thunder.

"Too late," Wolf Halloran snarled. Then, raising his voice: "Come on! Toward the space port! All of you! Ramed's fleet has struck! His Tandor-ians will be in the streets any minute. We've got to fight!"

A deep-throated roar went up from the crew. There was no fear in the cry, nor any perceptible anger. It was a howl of approval from men who loved to fight and welcomed the opportunity.

They surged out into the street and found it was as Wolf had said. Already the cold-eyed, uniformed fighters from Tandor, Ramed's invader planet, had jetted down into the Settlement. They moved like robots, like the soulless, fearless killing machines they were. Jetted down from the flying platforms hovering close above, to form in solid ranks and fire at anything that moved.

Well schooled in the art of concentrated carnage, Wolf's crew went to work with great zest. Their first

tactic was to sweep in among their foemen—to infiltrate Ramed's squads and seek battle at close quarters so the latter were unable to use their weapons for fear of cutting each other down.

The Martians scorned man-made weapons and fought only with their hands. They moved stolidly through the street, their great paws descending on Tandorian heads with all the semblance of schoolmasters patting prize pupils. But the hands invariably squeezed into fists and the heads cracked like eggshells and were ground into pulp, helmets and all. The Neptunian birdmen worked from above, each with a para-gun, wreaking deadly and accurate havoc. And the Plutonians were the most dreaded fighters of all. A man dying from the sting of a Plutonian's tail, died in agony, and his scream was a terrible thing.

WOLF HALLORAN and Lars Anson fought shoulder to shoulder. Each with a short-knife and a doubled fist, they formed a deadly phalanx, spear-heading the drive up the street and toward the space-port.

Wolf ripped his knife across the throat of a Tandorian captain just as Lars, hard pressed fore and flank, stumbled against Wolf's shoulder. Wolf arced out an arm to slash the life from one of Lars' attackers and growled, "Watch your big feet, you clumsy Swede!"

Lars, blood dripping from a slash across his great chest, roared, "It's all right, bossman. Stick close to old Lars. He'll—ouch!—he'll get you through."

"Why, damn your eyes! If you hadn't been laying up in a whiskey house, we'd have had plenty of time to—" Wolf broke off as a tableau nearby caught his attention. An Earthman—a slim handsome youth of not more than twenty, was helpless in the clutch of two Tandorians. They

were making no effort to kill the boy; rather they were dragging him grimly toward an alleyway off the scene of battle.

This procedure was exceptional, Tandorians seldom sparing the lives of their enemies, and Wolf's interest was aroused. Could the youth be someone of importance? This didn't seem logical as he was shabbily dressed and indescribably dirty.

A group of three Tandorians hit Wolf as one man, bent savagely on the kill, and for a time Wolf had his hands full. He cut the closest throat with a quick deadly jab, smashed a fist into the face nearest his own, and took the third man in a bear hug. At this point the obliging Lars reached over and killed the man with a single knife thrust.

"Don't bother to thank me," Lars grinned. "I'd do it for anyone."

"Sure," Wolf said. "I hold 'em and you kill 'em. Go get your own."

There was a momentary lull and Wolf again saw the youth and the two Tandorians. The boy was fighting like a young tiger, but he was losing the battle. Another moment or two and the three would disappear from view into the alley.

Attracted probably by the youth's courage in the face of odds, Wolf Halloran hurled a Tandorian into the waiting hands of a Martian and dived toward the two who were dragging the boy away. Coming in at their flank, he made short work of them. They melted to the pavement never knowing from whence death had struck.

The youth whirled and looked up at Wolf. For a moment he stood bewildered. Then white teeth flashed through the grime on his face.

"Thanks. I was almost done for."

"Stick close to me. We're getting clear now."

The youth had quick, intelligent eyes. "Space port?"

"Uh-huh. Got a ship there. Let's go."

Wolf's crew was now sweeping away the last of the Tandorians contesting a side gate to the space port. Only a handful of Ramed's fighters, stunned at the savagery with which their ranks had been thinned, remained to be overrun and annihilated. There was the sick sound of heads crushed in Martian hands, the agonized screams of those suddenly injected with Plutonian poison. Then only a gate—a gate of solid two-inch steel in front of Wolf and his men.

Two Martians reached for the gate. They took it in their four hands. The fist-sized lock snapped like a dry twig and the gate bent outward in the middle.

"Tube Six!" Wolf yelled, and the unholy crew swept forward brushing minor resistance out of its path. The ramp door was open and Wolf stood beside it as they streamed inside. His dark face lit up with fierce pride as he watched them. Close beside him was the boy, and Wolf's hand ground into his shoulder.

"There's a crew to have with you on a dark night, boy! They'll fight from here to the last galaxy, by God! Wolf Halloran's men!"

The youth writhed away with a cry of pain, then looked up and smiled crookedly. "Do you have to smash my shoulder? I might need it sometime."

LARS ANSON strode up carrying an injured Neptunian birdman in his arms. "Got a hole ripped in one wing. Hope he's okay. We need these guys!"

"How do we stand?"

"Not bad." Lars turned and ran a practiced eye over the men crowding into the ship. "We lost some but we picked up some others on the way. We still got a crew."

"Get on inside and see that the jets are ready. We aren't out of the woods yet."

Lars glanced at the youth beside Wolf. "Friend of yours?"

"We're taking him with us. Get going."

Lars disappeared into the ship and the tail-end of the crew followed him. Wolf's eyes went swiftly around the port, judging, estimating, figuring chances. The place was intact because Ramed hadn't dared destroy it. A bomb on the space port and he'd have no place to bring in his big space liners and ships-of-war.

But fresh groups of Tandorians were coming down now, settling over the port like locusts. Also, Ramed's tacticians would already be informed of what had happened, that a ship was preparing to jet from the port. Dozens of guns would be poised to knock it out of the sky. And it was all-important that this should be done. The backbone of Ramed's attack had been surprise. He had struck at Earth, a member of the Solar Federation, and now he needed time to consolidate his conquest before the other planets knew of his treachery. They would hear of it, of course, in time, but if even a single ship got away immediately to carry the news, Ramed's bold scheme could collapse around his ears.

Wolf Halloran knew this attack, in all its ferocity, had been duplicated at every space port on Earth and that the immediate objective was complete paralysis of space travel. He believed that a great deal hinged on his getting his own ship, *Space Wanderer II*, into the void.

"You said you were taking me with you?"

His train of thought broken, Wolf frowned down at the youth. "Certainly, unless you want to stay here."

There was something in the boy's eyes; the shadow of doubt; even a

shade of fear. "I—"

"Well—speak up! Do you or don't you? It's war now, of course. Maybe you're afraid of war."

The handsome dark eyes flashed. "I'm not afraid of anything!"

"Then get aboard. We can't stand here all day!"

Wolf reached around, caught the youth by the seat of his pants and heaved him up the ramp. With a quick glance around, he followed swiftly and called out, "All in! Secure exits!"

As though with a mind of its own, the triple-thick door slammed into its rubber jambs, squeezed down as the compressed air drove home, and whined as the locks snapped tight.

A soft whispering voice, that of a birdman in the pilot room, came over the speaker. "Requesting clearance."

"Clearance be damned! Get going!"

That was the bark of Wolf Halloran, and now Lars Anson's voice filled the ship. "We got as much chance as a wingless duck up above. What about that, bossman?"

"Level off under their guns. Right after the first jet blast at eight miles. Try and keep her below twelve until we're clear."

Lars Anson's chuckle came back. "A nice trick if I can do it."

"You'll do it or none of us will be here for breakfast."

The birdman's voice came soft and impersonal over the speaker. "Prepare for blast."

A moment later there was a deep muffled roar. The huge space liner shuddered and a great whining sound went through the passages and vents of the inner shell. Wolf, pressed hard against the rubber wall of the passage, opened grim lips to say, "This is it. Let's hope the fusings hold when she straightens out. Down on the floor or it'll break your back!"

There was a sickening wrench, a

seeming scream of indignation from the *Space Wanderer II* as she heeled over at eight miles and rocketed along practically skimming the tree tops. Lars Anson's laconic comment over the speaker from above, brought some comfort:

"There's a blanket of gunfire over us—about twenty miles. We're not rising, though, and they won't have time to check range. Looks like the old kite did it."

Wolf Halloran got to his feet and dusted off his pants. There was a look of satisfaction in his eyes. Then they turned to the boy, who was also on his feet, and Wolf scowled.

"Why the hell don't you wash your face?"

CHAPTER II

The Unseen Peril

WOLF HALLORAN pointed to a door leading rearward of his cabin. "You can clean up in there," he said. Then, apparently forgetting the youth, he sat down at his desk and began sorting through a stack of papers. A few moments later he looked up to find the boy still standing there.

Wolf scowled and his smouldering dark eyes threw sparks. "I said go in and clean up! When I give an order on this ship, it's obeyed!"

The handsome face was set in an expression of defiance. But under the drive of Wolf's eyes the youth flushed and all resistance wilted. "Y-yes sir."

"And don't waste water. It's got to last."

Wolf went back to his papers. He was studying the check list of the richest cargo he'd ever brought out of the Planetoids. Crates of pitchblende so rich it had to be encased in lead plates. Bales of leider fur soft enough to float in mid-air yet practically imperishable. Oil from the Lantron seael which would flow in sub-zero tem-

peratures.

A rich cargo unloaded at Chicago and waiting to be scooped up by Ramed's foragers. Unloaded and not paid for, Wolf thought bitterly. Eight months out in the Planetoids and not a dollar to show for it. His bitterness welled mainly from the manner in which the cargo had been lost. The rage boiled up in him at the thought that Ramed dared challenge the mighty Solar Federation. For a thousand years the Solar Planets had been banded together in a pact of mutual protection and assurance. Centuries before, when the first of the raiders from outer space had invaded the System and established a base on Pluto, the Federation had been born. Since that long gone day, several others had tried to grab one of the rich inner planets only to be annihilated.

Fighting together against all comers, the Federation had grown strong, mutual trust had bloomed and the fighting fleets of Earth, Mars, Venus, and the rest, had wiped void clean of hostile ships. For centuries, no outer pirate, however daring, had courted sure destruction by initiating an attack.

So, as the decades rolled by, the war fleets of the Federation had less and less to do until finally they became only symbols of the System's fighting history.

And the men who manned these fleets had grown soft, Wolf thought bitterly. The fighters grew soft and the leaders arrogant and complacent in the security of centuries. Wise men had seen this process of weakening and had warned of the lean hungry wolves of the void, watching and yearning for the rich prizes of the System. Wise men warned, but their words were shouted down in Council meetings. Why should anyone worry about a few impoverished barbarians

from out beyond Saturn? A motley band of ignorant, stupid savages.

Ignorant? Wolf Halloran had seen their ships with his own eyes, watched the smart maneuvering of their war games and seen them blast whole planetoids into dust during their war games.

Impoverished? He and his crew had seen a wealth of war material streaking through void time and again. He was one of the few who realized the doughty Ramed eyed the Inner Federation not only with yearning for loot but with hatred of its smug superiority; with a desire to bring it to its knees and watch it crawl past him in chains.

But Wolf's voice was small, unheard in the high places. And when Ramed begged permission to visit the System in order to "study Inner Federation culture," Wolf roared his protests along with a few others. He was not heard and Ramed was invited in.

Then this impoverished barbarian, this ignorant savage, wheeled his own planet into the System, brought Tandor into an orbit between Earth and Venus. The powers that guided the Federation opened their eyes in wonder. There had been some mistake. No one had authorized Ramed to bring his planet with him.

But the Federation had grown bulky in its lush easy years and the red tape was thick. The gears began creaking out a protest but now it had happened. Ramed had struck and the Federation would have to slough off the fat of centuries and again fight savage destruction.

It wouldn't be too difficult though, Wolf told himself. After all, Ramed had proved himself a fool. Evidently he, too, was cocksure, complacent in his power. Once the System had been warned, their fleets would darken the sky over Earth and Ramed's le-

gions would be decimated to a man.

WOLF LOOKED up from his desk to see Lars Anson enter the cabin. "All clear now," the golden-headed Scandanavian said. "We could have been blasted out of space a couple of times. Only my superior skill as a pilot saved us."

Wolf looked up at the grinning face but did not reply in kind. "We've got to get to Mars fast. Time means everything now. Our chances of hitting a Federation patrol are pretty slim and wouldn't help much anyhow. It will take the whole Martian fleet to stop this joker Ramed."

"And maybe the fleets of a few other planets, too. We'll keep all jets open and make Mars in eight days."

"Six at the most."

"What do you want to do? Rip the ship apart?"

"Six days."

Lars Anson shrugged. "Okay. We'll burn the jets out."

"And that lad I picked up. He's in washing up. When he's through I'll send him out. Find something for him to do."

Lars Anson left, whistling cheerily between his teeth and Wolf Halloran went back to his papers. A few minutes later he got to his feet, went swiftly across the cabin and through the rearward door. His entrance was abrupt and it brought a frightened cry from the person inside.

Wolf stopped and stood frozen, caught—one of the few times in his life—utterly flat-footed. The grimy faced youth he'd sent into the room a short time before, had evidently dissolved into thin air. In his place was a slim, beautifully formed, naked girl. But naked only for a moment. Wolf got a kaleidoscopic impression of proudly tilted breasts, smooth brown hips, and legs tapering down in breathtaking glory.

But over and above all these

things, a pair of wide and outraged eyes. Then a towel was whipped around the young body and the girl was backed defensively against the wall. "Get out! Get out! You—you beast!"

Wolf took a step backward, but only to come against the door which had swung closed behind him. "By the great Gan! What—? Where—?"

Two large tears appeared, to roll down the girl's shining clean cheeks. She extended a hand as though in defense, but could find no words.

"Good lord!" Wolf said. "How was I to know? Why in hell didn't you tell me? Why didn't you lock the door?"

"I—I thought I did."

"You didn't tell me a damn thing! Not even your name."

"I mean I thought I locked the door."

"Oh. That lock never did work."

Wolf was scowling now. "Listen here, young lady! You've got a lot of questions to answer. In the first place—"

"Please—won't you let me get dressed?"

"I haven't got any clothes for a girl. You'll have to wear that bath towel I guess."

"I'll put my old clothes back on. I intended to anyway. But please wait in the other room."

Wolf's eyes opened wider now as a thought struck him. "So that was it. I wondered why those two Tanderians were trying to drag you away. They *knew*."

The girl had large eyes, violet now in the reflected light, and high cheek bones. A portrait artist would have fallen in love with her face at first glimpse. Her cheeks flamed red and the eyes dropped in embarrassment. Her voice came in a whisper. "Yes. They knew. I was trapped against a wall when they jetted down. One of them—bumped against me—got his

hands on me and—and told the other.”

Wolf opened the door. “Get dressed,” he said gruffly. “I’ll wait out here.”

OUTSIDE, Wolf paced the confines of his cabin, scowling darkly. Here was a fine mess of fish! In the five years he’d owned the *Space Wanderer II*, no woman had ever before walked up its ramp. Women and space freighting didn’t mix. Women, like whiskey, awaited the men landside and were left landside at all times.

Wolf, captain and owner, could have carried a woman aboard if he so chose, but he considered it bad for morale. A woman, even a wife, could cause trouble on the trips through void, where violent men had time to think and hot desires could boil up to raise havoc.

Wolf was brooding on his new difficulty when the inner door opened and she came out into the larger cabin. She closed the door and stood there in silence, head held high, her face expressionless.

Without a word, Wolf turned and with two quick strides was close to her. He reached out and swept her into his arms. His lips found hers in the same quick motion with which he swept her up. For a moment they both stood there, motionless.

Then, silently, desperately, she was fighting; not wasting any breath on screams, but fighting with an instinct and a savageness that was inherent in her being.

Immediately Wolf released her. She stepped back, crouching against the wall, ready to fight again. Her breath came sharply as she said, “You’re big and strong and I know it isn’t any use begging. You can take me but I’ll fight to the last! You hear that? I’ll fight until I’m unconscious! Then I’ll wake up and fight some more! Even after it’s—too late, I’ll

still fight you!”

“Forget it. I just had to find out something.”

“Find out what?”

“About you. What kind of a girl you are.” He walked back and dropped into his chair, then continued. “A woman can play hell on a space-ship. Even a decent woman. The other kind!” He raised his hands in a helpless gesture. “The other kind can breed violence and mutiny. If I’d found you were the other kind I’d lock you in that room and throw the key away.”

“But I’m not. You *know* I’m not. I came with you because I was afraid of what could happen back there—what’s probably happening to a lot of women right now.”

“That poses even a bigger problem. It would be inhuman to lock you up without just cause and now the point is—can you get away with it? Can you keep them from learning you’re a girl?”

“I fooled you.”

“Because you were covered with an inch of dirt. Was that part of your masquerade?”

His tone nettled her. “I fell in the dirt and rolled around while those two were getting me. You’d have been filthy too—”

“Forget that. What about now?”

“I can go on being a boy. I’ll stay out of the way. No one will notice me.”

WOLF WAS unconvinced. He gestured with a wave of his hand. “You’re different already. You’re—blooming.”

She glanced down at her breasts and flushed. “I had a-a band. I’ll put it back on.”

“You’re damn right you will! Now sit down and answer some questions. First, who are you and what’s your name?”

"My name is Patricia Ransom and—"

"That's 'good at least. I can call you Pat without getting tripped up."

"—and I'm nobody."

"Talk sense. 'Everyone is somebody."

"I mean I'm just—ordinary." She crossed to the lounge chair and sat down facing Wolf, one foot curled under her. "I won't beat around the bush. My mother is dead and I live—lived in Chicago with my father. Dad was all right. A good man basically, but weak. He couldn't leave the booze alone and he liked the raw, burning stuff he could get in the Settlement. That's why I was down there when the soldiers came—looking for him. I—I never found him."

Wolf was regarding her critically. "I think you're telling the truth—"

She flared and her chin came up. "Of course I'm telling the truth. I've never lied in my life."

"I wouldn't have taken you aboard if I'd known, but as long as you're here we'll have to make the best of it."

The outer door opened but Wolf did not look around. Only one man in the ship had the privilege of opening Wolf Halloran's door without knocking. Lars Anson said, "Ha! He's human after all. I was wondering what we'd find under that coat of filth."

"We struck pay dirt," Wolf retorted. "He isn't a he. He's a she. She's a girl. Oh hell! You know what she is. Just look at her."

Lars was looking. He whistled through his teeth. "Well, I'll be damned! But Wolf! I'm surprised at you. Great Gan! You know—"

"Of course I know! It's just as much a surprise to me. Now the point is—what can we do with her? Where can we put her—him?"

"In the kitchen. It's the only logical place. Old Adams is half blind and

she can stay out of the men's way." Lars grinned. "She can bring you your dinner; polish up the cabin. There shouldn't be any trouble unless she—"

"She won't."

Lars paused for a moment. "Wait a minute. I'm not so sure. Adams is half blind but—"

Wolf looked up and noted the direction of Lars' eyes. "She's going to take care of those—that," he said sourly. "What's the general outlook?"

Lars shrugged. "All jets belching and we're alone in the sky. We'll make it in six days, God and the outer shell willing."

"Then we just sit back and cool our heels." He turned toward the silent Patricia Ransom. "Go in and dress yourself properly. Then Lars will show you to the kitchen."

THE BIG ship rocketed on through space and one day followed another. For Wolf Halloran they dragged like centuries. He attended to routine duties and played chess with Lars Anson during leisure hours. Though he wouldn't admit it, even to himself, he came to look forward to the hours when Pat brought his meals. However, he had little to say to her and only once did he speak personally. That was when she brought him his ash tray; just before Lars Anson called over the speaker: "Mars ho!" As she was leaving, Wolf turned and said, "Don't take it too hard. Maybe your dad got away. I'll bet even money you'll see him again." She thanked him with a smile as she left the cabin. After she was gone, he muttered, "Pretty girl. Damn pretty girl."

An hour later the *Space Wanderer* was circling the heavens over New London where Mars' only space port was located. Wolf stood beside Lars in the pilot room as the latter called

for a berth.

"*Space Wanderer II*—out of Chicago, Terra. Landing permit requested."

A voice came out of the ether. "Wolf Halloran's ship?"

"You're damn right," Lars replied.

"Welcome, Halloran. Berth Four clear and waiting."

"Take her in," Wolf said. "Now, by God, we'll see how long Ramed roosts Earthside! Tell them to have a car ready. I'm heading straight for the Council Building. Maybe those old idiots'll comb some of the red tape out of their beards this time."

Under the practiced hand of Lars Anson, the *Space Wanderer II* nosed smoothly into berth, settled on the rockers, and puffed out a last pink cloud of jet wash. Lars grinned and looked up at Wolf Halloran. "Best damn pilot on the space lanes, bossman. I wonder what the hell you'd do without me?"

But Wolf was not smiling back. He stared out through the pilot window, his slightly narrowed eyes darting over the scene below.

"I don't like this."

"Why—what's wrong?"

"I don't know."

"Everything looks normal to me."

Wolf was scowling. "Call it instinct. Call it anything, but I've had this feeling before. Maybe its because things look too normal—as though someone arranged it."

There was no levity in Lars Anson now. He knew Wolf Halloran; knew the hair-trigger balance of the man's mind. "You think—?"

Wolf's tone was fierce—intense. "We were fools, Lars—fools. We took it for granted Ramed struck only at Earth. But how do we *know* that? How do we know he didn't take over Mars first—and maybe the rest of the inner planets?"

Lars' eyes widened. "You're right!

We're a pair of prize idiots! Let's get out of here!"

Wolf's voice bellowed out over the speaker. "Fuse jets! Prepare for blast!"

But before the tones died away, Lars Anson gripped Wolf's wrist and spoke quietly. "It's too late, bossman. Look at that."

A great, lumbering space transport, three times as big as the sleek *Space Wanderer*, had been crossing the port on idle jets, headed evidently for the repair sheds. Now quick flame spurted from its tubes as it heeled around. Sensing the maneuver, Wolf barked, "Quick! We can still beat them. Blast off! Blast off!"

Lars shook his head. "Not a chance. It will take three minutes at least to get our heat back. We're staying here, Wolf."

The two men watched as the big transport, guided by a skilled hand, moved squarely across the *Space Wanderer's* bow. It came to rest, looming even above the pilot window, locking the *Wanderer* tight into her berth.

As the transport's jet fire softened to a pink cloud, a voice came from the Martian Control Center, a suave, mocking voice: "At ease, Halloran. This planet is in the hands of Ramed, Lord of Inner and Outer Space. You will follow orders to the letter, else you, your ship and your crew will be melted down in your berth."

There was a moment of stunned silence in the *Wanderer's* pilot room. This was broken by muttered words from Lars Anson: "Lord of Inner and Outer Space. Well, I'll be damned! Our boy Ramed can sure think up the fancy titles."

CHAPTER III

The Glory That Was Rome..

THERE WAS nothing to do but to obey; nothing for Wolf Halloran to do but flex his muscles against the

chains on his wrists and drink the bitter gall of defeat. Under the concentration of a hundred para-guns and heat tubes, he and his men had been marched in single file from the *Space Wanderer II*. Wolf Halloran had been as vicious and snarling as any one of his wild, hard-bitten crew. The process bore great semblance to that of unloading the weird and hate maddened beasts of the Planetooids which daring hunters sometimes brought in for the zoos of the inner planets' cities.

And all the while, Wolf Halloran was engaged in a mental battle with himself. Raging at himself for thoughts which came unbidden to his mind.

It was the girl, the slim, beautiful creature, Patricia Ransom. Her masquerade had fooled them when she marched, just ahead of Wolf, down the ramp from the *Space Wanderer*. A guard had slapped chains on her wrists and had given her scarcely a look. But what lay in the future? Could Pat possibly go through an extended period of captivity without revealing her sex? And when that was discovered—

Wolf's muscles tightened at the thought. He knew what a prize Pat would be to these pirates from outer space. Better she die, even at the hands of Wolf himself, than to be uncovered in naked glory to these men.

Also in Wolf's mind was the resentment at his own caring. What had happened to him? Wolf Halloran, the hard cold adventurer to far places. Had he gone soft? Here he'd been outgeneraled, outmaneuvered, brought to his knees, defenseless without ship or crew; and his greatest worry was a slip of a girl who counted not one iota in his destiny.

As he marched away from the port, he resolved to think of her no fur-

ther. After all, she was not his responsibility. His obligation was to the crew that had been loyal to him. He had to keep his mind clear, his eyes sharp. If there was a way out of this mess, he'd certainly not find it while mooning over a girl.

But his worry over her safety would not depart. Even as they were marched into the great gray building from which they might never emerge, his eyes were on her slim shoulders and the proud tilt of her head. And he warned himself with a thought:

By God, she'll fight them to the end. They'll find no whimpering submissive female in her. She'll fight!

And it was at that moment that he knew he loved her.

WALKING behind her, down the echoing corridor, was pure hell. The moment was approaching when they would be separated. Then there was relief such as he had never before known, when the guard opened a cell door and motioned them both inside. Glory be to Gan! he told himself. They didn't notice. They still think she's a boy. Tomorrow, of course, would come, but the moment was safe!

"Are you cold?"

"A little. But it's these chains. Why do they leave them on?"

"They're taking no chances."

"What are they going to do with us?"

"I don't know. They must have something in mind or they'd have killed us all at the space port. No use worrying until we find out."

"Will they feed us?"

"I hope so. You're trembling."

"It is cold in here."

"Come closer."

"I don't want to be any bother."

"Here—I'll raise my arms. Under the chains."

"You're the only real friend I ever had."

"Lars is your friend too."

"Yes—but I mean—"

"I think I know what you mean."

"Oh, Wolf—Wolf—I'm sorry. I can't help it."

"Can't help what? Don't sob, Pat. Just lie still."

"Loving you! I can't help it. I know it's silly—like a bug looking up at a giant—but you've been so good to me. A girl couldn't help loving a man who—"

"Is that the only reason?—Pat—answer me. Is it just gratitude?"

"No! No! How can you be such a fool? I want you, Wolf. I want you more than anything in life. I'm not afraid to die but I don't want to die before I've had you and you've had me. Oh, Wolf! There's so little time! Hold me—hold me."

"I've loved you all the time, but I wouldn't admit it. Back on the *Wanderer*—"

"You wanted me then?"

"Yes."

"And now we're together—together, Wolf. Alone."

Suddenly she smiled and the tears in her eyes were like diamonds. The smile turned impish, reflecting her sudden, wild happiness.

"Wolf—this damn band—"

"Leave it on. Someone might come in. It's your protection against—"

"I know. Wolf, kiss me—hard—hard—hard."

"Pat—your band. I want to put something under it."

"What, darling?"

"This." Wolf reached into his boot and drew out a thin, silver knife. It had a flat blade an inch wide and the handle was mother-of-pearl, running into the blade without bulge or guard. "It saved my life several times. I want you to keep it in there. If the worst comes—you know what to do."

"I know, but let's not think about tomorrow. Hold me close. I'm cold."

WOLF HALLORAN and Lars Anson stood in front of a throne upon which sat a tall, sneering underlord from outer space.

Lars Anson looked at Wolf, the squint of his eyes denoting mental effort. "What was it the flunky said? Dezi Vanya—Lord Under Ramed of the Planet Mars and All Its Satellites. Great Gan! How these characters do carry on!"

"Silence," roared Vanya. "Another word and I'll have you flayed alive!"

"Like hell you will!"

A vein stood out on Vanya's forehead, but before he could speak, Wolf went on: "The fact that we weren't all killed at the space port proves we aren't going to be killed at all—at least not for the time being. We're being saved, alive and whole, for something, and I think I know what it is."

Lars Anson cut in, his eyes on Vanya: "How in all hell did the guy ever raise a beard like that?"

Vanya's eyes blazed as his hand went to the square black beard of which he was inordinately proud. He came to his feet, a hand raised as though to call down terrible judgement. But there was Wolf's cold voice ahead of him: "Cut it out, Lars. He doesn't know any better. Besides if you rile him up he might cut your rations."

"God forbid! They're small enough now."

"Sit down, Vanya. You can blow yourself up as big as a house, but Ramed is still head man."

"I am Lord of all Mars!"

"You're—!" Lars stated in disgust, and the word he used made even the stone-faced guard blink.

"I said cut it out, Lars. You aren't helping things any. Vanya—as I was saying, we're slated for Tander and

Ramed's pleasure city. Isn't that right?"

The underlord sat down, his sneer deepening. "That's right, Halloran. And my only regret is that I won't be there to see it; to see you brought screaming to your knees."

"That I'd like to see myself," Lars said.

"For some reason the great Ramed has respect for your ability as a fighter. He wants you and your crew delivered to him at New Rome on Tandor. He feels that you will provide him with a few minutes of amusement." Vanya smiled like a lazy cat.

"When do we leave?"

"A little amusement that is, before you're put in cages and paraded through the streets for all Tandorians to laugh at. I suspect that by that time the myth of Inner Federation superiority will be pretty well destroyed."

"I said, when do we leave?"

Vanya flared in helpless rage. "When I choose to send you!"

"You mean when Ramed says he wants us."

"Take them away! Take them out of here or by my beard, I'll kill them with my own hands!"

As they were marched back to their cells, Lars said, "The guy swears by his beard. Maybe he keeps one of his gods under there."

Pat was waiting in the cell, and as Wolf entered, she was close to him, her eyes searching his magnificent body. "What did they do to you? Did they hurt you?"

"No. We're safe until we leave Mars."

"We're leaving?"

"Yes. For Tandor. We're to serve in Ramed's games."

There was bright concern in her eyes and a lump arose in Wolf Halloran's throat as he realized the concern was entirely for him; that this

girl, for whom the future held potentials of unknown horror, had no thought for herself.

"Come," she said. "Sit here by the wall. Tell me about Ramed's games. I've only heard of them vaguely."

He took her chin in his hand and turned her face upward, drinking in the closeness of her. "Do you know your ancient history? Did you ever read accounts of the Roman Empire?"

"Oh, yes. That was thousands of years ago."

"Well, Ramed read about them, too, and they captured his imagination. He thought so much of their way of life that he built a city on Tandor and called it New Rome. It's a city dedicated to pleasure and the Tandorians are allowed to take turns living there. It's exactly like ancient Rome. They wear togas and have their games in the Colosseum and wear togas just as the ancient Romans did. It's a perfect project of Ramed and every detail is perfect. The soldiers there even use ancient weapons such as swords and clubs. The blood flows and the people are happy."

Wolf felt the girl tremble in his arms. "Your blood will flow," she whispered.

"As will the blood of us all, if Ramed has his way."

Then Wolf's eyes went vague. "But perhaps not. There's a possibility that things may turn out differently—a faint possibility."

Pat held up her face eagerly. "But that's tomorrow, and today we live and we're together. Oh, Wolf! I love you so!"

Wolf Halloran held her close, but his eyes remained far away, and behind them, a cunning brain was at work.

THE SPACE WANDERER II jetted off from Mars on the following day. But a new crew manned the

tubes and a new pilot sat at the controls. Rearward, chained in the storage cells of the after housing, rode the Martians and the Venusians and the Mercurians and the Earthmen who had built for the *Wanderer* a reputation in all the reaches of the void.

Lars, chained for the trip with Wolf and Pat, bewailed his humiliation in pungent words. "That damned outer space pig in my pilot room—sitting in *my* chair. Some fine day I'll rip the cushion out and stuff it—" Lars looked quickly at Pat and reformed the words to come out—"stuff it down his rotten throat."

Pat looked at him in gentle wonder. "You're so marvelous—both of you—so sure of yourselves—so certain things will turn out all right."

Lars simulated surprise. "Why, honey! You're riding with Wolf Halloran—and me, too, of course. A couple of the smartest, toughest spacemen who ever blew a jet."

"Sure," Wolf snapped bitterly. "Smart. That's why we're sitting chained in the backwash of our own ship. Smart."

"Well," Lars said lamely, "things do go wrong once in a while." Then he became suddenly aware of the fact that Pat had crawled into Wolf's arms and lay with her head on his great chest. "Well I'll be damned! You two going together?"

"Shut up. She's asleep."

One of Lars Anson's rare sober moments crept over him. He stared at Pat while his face darkened and his lips turned grim. "Poor kid. There may be tough times ahead for her."

"Not if I can help it. Listen, I've got an idea and now's a good time to thresh it over."

"Shoot," Lars said. "I'm listening."

...An hour later, Lars shook his head dubiously. "It might work—just might—but it's a long shot, bossman."

"We've played long shots before—

and won."

"Yes, but this one—everything's got to work perfectly, not only afterward, but before. Every card's got to drop in place like a little trained bird."

"We'll make them drop in place."

Lars twisted around to bring greater comfort to his cramped back. "What do you suppose is happening around the sun? Do you think Ramed has all the planets? Do you think we're done for?"

"No. Maybe he's landed on all the planets, but we aren't done for. The Federation's too big. It will take a little time, but the secret bases are still there. The spare fleets are still hidden out in the Planetoids. It's just a matter of time."

Lars was again dubious. "This boy Ramed is pretty smart."

"So was Napoleon. So was Hitler."

Lars frowned. "You and your ancient history again. And by the way—just who the hell *was* Hitler? I never spent much time in school. Never found out about him."

"I'll tell you sometime. Let's get some sleep."

THE SPACE WANDERER settled to berth at the Calderon space port on Tandor three days later. The people from outer space had evidently been informed of Ramed's triumphs, because they were in a frenzy of joy as the prisoners were paraded, under heavy guard, through the streets toward the prison. And it occurred to Wolf, as he watched them, that Ramed's indoctrination of ancient customs had gone deeper than supposed. Even in this busy, modern city, there was a sprinkling of togas, and many women wore long loose Roman gowns. There were short-swords in scabbards of glittering metal, antiquated helmets.

But the greatest evidence was in

the people themselves. There was cruelty in the faces lining the walk; dissipation was evident in the loose filthy talk, and in the blood lust of their eyes.

Wolf, studied deeply into ancient history, told himself: This is a Roman mob. It is no different from the decadent pleasure-hungry Roman populace of the Empire's dying years. This is no lean and hungry race; no people ripe for greatness; young and strong of mind and muscle. This is a pack of mad animals, taught their way of life by a crazy genius. These people are nothing. There is only Ramed to deal with.

There was something about their raw bestiality that made Wolf's skin crawl and he was glad when the thick walls of the prison cut off their blood-lusting howls.

Again the crew was put into cells and as Lars was pushed through a door with two Mercurian birdmen, he looked back at Wolf and Pat with a wry grin. "Life's just one dark hole after another," he said. "It's getting monotonous."

But Pat had no answering smile. Her face was drawn and pale. As the door of the next cell closed upon them, she turned to Wolf. "I'm afraid. I think that guard—"

Wolf's hands were tight on her shoulders. "What about the guard?"

"The way he looked at me. And a couple of times he saw to it that his hands brushed against me. Once—very hard. I think he knows—or suspects."

Wolf drew her close to him and cursed under his breath. They had been so fortunate—the gods of luck had been with them for so long—that he had dared hope—hope Pat's slim, boyish figure and short hair would get them through until he was in a position to put his plan into operation. Even now he clung desperately

to his hope. "Maybe you're wrong, darling. Possibly it was just your imagination. I think the guard would have done something about it had he suspected."

She was fighting the fear but it came like a flood. "Done something? Dragged me away into a room—where they would reach out and put their hands on me?"

"Stop it! Stop it!"

"I'm sorry." She raised her head and forced a smile. "I still have the knife."

He held her close and whispered fiercely, "We're still alive—and we're still together."

CHAPTER IV

Ramed—Alias Nero

A SHORT time later, Wolf Hal-loran stood alone before a second throne in a far larger and more ornate throne room than the one he'd seen on Mars. Beside Ramed's quarters, those of the underling who ruled only one planet was shabby and drab indeed. Great flaming banners of rich tapestry decorated the walls, reaching to the hundred-foot ceiling. The floor was of marble burnished to the highest sheen. The dais upon which sat Ramed's throne appeared to be pure silver. The throne itself could have been carved from a block of gold. The two front legs of the creation were shaped like tiger's claws, and each one gripped a blood-red ruby the size of a man's fist.

Poor impoverished barbarians, Wolf thought sourly. Only fools sit on the Council of the Inner Federation!

But Wolf's attention was drawn to Ramed himself. Never before had he set eyes on the man, and if he had thought him an upstart, an opportunist, his opinion changed abruptly. Beyond doubt here was power: a strong

compelling personality inside a gross body that lounged indolently in dark red satin. Ramed had thick fat-encased arms and soft ugly hands which now fondled a violin. His face was also corpulent, but knifing out from between the layers of fat were a pair of eyes as sharp and icy cold as any Wolf had ever seen. Those eyes missed nothing. They saw those of Wolf Halloran flick downward toward the violin.

"Are you by any chance a student of ancient things? Have you ever read of the Roman Empire?"

"A great deal of history," Wolf replied.

"Then you know, of course, that Nero did not really play a violin."

"It was some sort of a stringed instrument comparable, I believe, to the zither of centuries ago."

Ramed's eyes lit up. "Exactly. I'm elated to find you so well read. From reports I imagined your only talent was one for violence and piracy?"

"Piracy? I have never engaged in it."

Ramed shrugged. "You've exploited the poor unfortunates of the Planetoids, taken their treasures in exchange for—what?"

"What they asked for."

"A few beads and bright trinkets. If I recall, your forebears treated the so-called Indians of Earth's western hemisphere in much the same manner. Later, I believe, they slaughtered the poor creatures."

Wolf frowned. "I don't think you brought me here to discuss history."

Ramed snapped a string on the violin and listened with satisfaction to the rich tone. "Indeed not. I brought you here to get a look at you. You see I've heard a great deal of the fabulous Wolf Halloran. Your name has been spread from the inner planets to the most distant reaches of known space. I wanted to discover if the tales

do you justice."

Wolf smiled without humor. "And what do you find?"

"I'm disappointed. Your stature and bearing are indeed impressive, but I can't forget how you blundered into the Martian space port and placed yourself in my hands. That detracted a great deal from your reputation."

"And now that I'm here—what do you plan to do with me?"

"In plain words, Halloran, I intend to discredit you. Discredit you and enjoy myself in the bargain. Thus I will accomplish two purposes with the one act: amuse myself and my subjects and destroy within my people, to some extent, their inherent fear and awe of you stupid arrogant inner planet asses. Clever, don't you think?"

"How do you propose to do this?"

RAMED SET his fat fingers together and stared over their tips at Wolf Halloran. "You will enter the arena at New Rome, my friend. You will fight for your life with a short-sword and a net against the finest rough-and-tumble killer we are able to produce." Here Ramed leaned forward on his glittering throne and his eyes were like chunks of ice. "But he will not kill you. After reducing you to helplessness, he will have orders to let you live. You will then be put into a wooden cage and carried through the streets to be spat upon by your betters. Then you will be left in the public square to die of hunger and thirst."

"That's the way they did it in old Rome, wasn't it?" Wolf asked.

Ramed nodded. "As you no doubt know, there is nothing really new. That procedure in old Rome had much to do with making the empire invincible for so many centuries. It instilled into the Roman a contempt for his enemies."

Wolf folded his arms and his eyes

were as cold as those of Ramed. "An ingenious plan but, frankly, you disappoint me."

"Disappoint you?"

"A sad lack of imagination, I'd say. You have me, of course; but you also hold captive a crew that has made a name for boldness, skill, and daring across the whole universe. Wouldn't it be smarter to discredit all of us in one—" Wolf stopped abruptly and held up one hand. "But no! I understand. You couldn't find a band of men in all creation who could stand against my crew and me for two minutes."

Ramed was silent for a long moment, his eyes boring into Wolf's face. He's clever, Wolf thought. So damn clever. Even now he senses a trap. He's probing for it. Everything hinges on his reply.

Ramed did sense a trap. But in seeking the reason for Wolf's suggestion, he made the mistake of underestimating his foe, of allowing contempt to fog his mind. "Oh, I see. You're much better at directing others, of hiding behind your menials, than doing your own fighting."

Wolf lowered his eyes in apparent confusion. Just a shade of confusion not overdone. Ramed's lip twisted and he raised his eyes to the ceiling. For a moment he remained deep in thought. Then he looked at Wolf and smiled coldly. "But your suggestion intrigues me. A pitched battle of that sort would whip the crowds to a frenzy. They would really appreciate what I do for them."

"I'm sure they would."

The interview was over abruptly. Ramed flicked a finger and two burly guards laid quick hands on Wolf. As he was led from the throne room, he heard the sweet clear tones of the violin as the would-be Nero, lounging on the golden throne, picked delicately at its strings.

Back down the long stone corridor he went—past the cells in which his crew was imprisoned. A guard unlocked the door and swung it open. Wolf was shoved into the dim cell with such force that his chains tripped him up and he fell to the stone floor. The door slammed behind him and the footsteps of the guards diminished.

But Wolf's attention was riveted on the interior of the cell. The silence and the emptiness. In quick desperation, he squeezed his eyes shut—snapped them open and looked around him.

Pat was gone.

NO MORE than five minutes after Wolf Halloran was taken from his cell to stand before Ramed, a key had again rattled in the lock and the door had swung open. Pat's first thought was that something had gone wrong and they'd brought Wolf back. She got up from where she sat crouched against the wall and stepped toward the door.

Then she froze. Wolf was not there. Only a guard was present, grinning at her; the guard she'd suspected during the march to the prison. He moved forward toward her, into the dimness of the cell and his leer was highlighted by the shadows. His voice was thick, oily; the smile lecherous.

"Thought you had me fooled, eh? Thought that Tanson doesn't know a girl when he sees one. But I'm smarter than the others, sweetheart. You couldn't fool me."

"Go away. Please! Leave me alone!"

"Now you just be nice and quiet and everything will be all right. Tanson won't give your secret away. Tanson will be good to you."

His hand was clammy on her face, heavy on her breast and at that moment she lost all hope. And with hope gone, there arose within her only an instinct to fight.

Her slim hands went out as claws and raked the hated face. The leer faded, giving place to surprise and rage as the man let loose a deep howl of pain. And on top of it, Pat's scream rang from the cell and down the low ceilinged corridors. Tanson's voice sounded in her ear: "Be quiet! Quiet, you idiot, or you'll bring trouble on both of us."

But silence was a thing of the past. As though Pat's screams were a signal, thunder went up from a hundred throats along the cell blocks: Wolf Halloran's crew giving voice in a concerted roar. The deep outraged bellow of the Martians, the screams of the cat-like Plutonians, the whine of the birdmen, the Mercurians beating their barrel chests with four arms and seemingly bellowing with two voices each. Pandemonium reigned supreme.

The guard fell back in consternation at the uproar he'd caused and Pat used that moment to flee the cell and go tearing down the long corridor as though all hell were at her heels.

She was running toward a door at the end furthest from the cell which she and Wolf had occupied. Only blank despair lay in her heart as she realized she would get nowhere, that the door would bring her to a halt like a trapped animal.

But as she moved swiftly toward it, the door began opening. Slowly, ponderously, it moved as though of great weight and then there was a uniformed Tandorian guard standing in the opening. He was checking to discover what the fuss was about, and Pat hit him with her shoulder and sent him sprawling. She teetered, lost her balance and went down also as the guard's bawl of surprise was added to the din.

But the girl was up instantly, driven by sheer desperation, and went through the doorway like a small

rocket. Another hallway stretched off into dimness. Pat sped its length and found a turn rather than solid wall at its far end. There a stairway led downward. Pat followed it, down, down, down in a never-ending spiral, to come finally into what appeared to be a trap. A circular low-ceilinged room from which there appeared to be no exit.

PAT STAGGERED to a halt and stood leaning against the stone wall. Her breath came in great sobs—sobs she had difficulty in holding back long enough to listen for pursuit. So far as she could tell, no one was following her. But she knew her good fortune could not last indefinitely and began searching for an exit. There appeared to be none.

This bewildered the girl. It made no sense that a stairway as broad and deep as this one would lead nowhere. Desperately she retraced her steps around the circular wall and found what she had overlooked in her haste—a section of wall, slightly ajar, that moved back easily when pressure was applied. Without hesitation she stepped through the breach. The door closed and she leaned against it, drawing in great gulps of the dank chilly air.

It was a strange silent place of light and shadow, and as Pat looked about her she had the sudden sick feeling of a trapped animal. There were people here in this dark place. A torch of some perpetually burning material was at her elbow, niched into the stone wall, and its light threw shadows and outlined the great cavern filled with silent people. Pat cringed back, whimpering, but the silent figures neither moved nor gave any sign.

There were literally hundreds of them standing about in groups with arms folded, but not a single sound arose from their lips.

Then a sound did arise, that of laughter coming from Pat's own lips. The sound of hysteria. But the girl, upon hearing it, showed herself a thoroughbred by taking a firm hold on her senses. There was an explanation to all this. There was an explanation to everything. And with that thought—it came to her—welled up out of her memory where it had lain for a long time—and she knew where she was.

In a Tandorian Chamber of Death.

The Tandorians, Pat remembered, were unlike any other known creatures in that they did not return to the dust from whence they sprang. Or possibly they did not spring from dust; she wasn't sure. Anyhow, dead Tandorians never lost the living form, and after death hardened slowly until their bodies were solid stone. So, in the ritual of burial, they were not covered over with the soil of the planet, but rather were put away in caverns such as these; were left sitting or standing, but seldom lying down, and always in the position in which they had died.

So Pat had come, by chance, into a Tandorian Hall of Death and the feeling that gripped her was one of unreality, as though she walked in a dream. But, strangely, she knew no fear. She moved forward, threading her way among the silent groups and her sensations were as impersonal as the myriads of dead eyes that stared at her.

I wonder, she thought, how one Tandorian knows another Tandorian is dead? Do they just stop walking around? Pat giggled and then jerked herself up sternly. This wouldn't do. A little more of this and she'd start cracking up. I may not know what the next hour will bring, she told herself, but I'm still alive—I'm still unharmed—and I'm sure Wolf still lives. All I have to do is keep going until

Wolf finds me. That's my job from now on. Stay alive and unharmed until Wolf comes.

Pat moved silently along, threading her way among the figures toward the far side of the chamber. There were torches placed here and there, evidently a Tandorian burial custom, and Pat could see that a great many of the bodies had already petrified, while others were so life-like as to be frightening.

She came at last to the far wall and discovered that this vast chamber, like the small anteroom at the foot of the outer stairs, was also circular. She turned to the right and began moving along the wall. The flares were placed at regular intervals, and it was beside the fourth flare that she found the narrow stairway leading downward.

Pat hesitated for a moment. What to do? Would it be better to remain here among the dead, or to follow her fortune on down this stairway to wherever it might lead? She turned to cast her eyes back over the hosts of silent dead. Then her mind was made up as sudden fear clutched her throat. She could have sworn that a nearby figure turned its head to stare at her.

It's getting the best of me, she thought. They're beginning to move. I'd better get out of here before they start dancing with each other. She snatched a torch from the wall and hurried down the narrow stairway, senses alert for what lay ahead.

It developed that nothing much lay ahead. Only an endless corridor that wound on and on and seemed to be slanted ever downward. Fear began to well up in Pat. Was there no end to this? Would it go on forever? The thought of returning to the burial chamber appalled her. Safely away from the place, its terrors were magnified in her mind.

She hurried on and fancied now that she heard footsteps behind her. Thus, a small cry escaped her lips as she rounded a turn in the corridor and came up against a dead end.

There was a feeling now, a tension, as her senses told her she was not alone. She turned to retrace her steps, came around the bend, and stopped with a hand flung across her mouth.

Too late! She was trapped. On the stone floor in front of her squatted a creature out of some madman's nightmare: an obscene, loathsome thing that grinned toothless there on the floor and cackled in what was meant to be laughter.

The thing said, "You must be crazy to come down here. No one goes past the Chamber of the Dead. No one with any sense. Come here and let me have a look at you."

CHAPTER V

Plan For Defeat

WOLF HALLORAN paced his cell like a wild beast. What had they done with Pat? Where had they taken her? He had vented his first flush of rage on the cell door, gripping the heavy steel bars in the small window and tearing at them until his great arms ached. He'd yelled for the guards and his cry had been taken up by his crew down the cell block, but no guards came. One appeared to be answering the summons, but he went on at a rapid pace. There was a scowl on his face as though trouble brewed at some other point in the vast jail.

Finally Wolf gave up and slumped to the floor of the cell, his face in his hands. There came to him a sudden wild urge to throw all his plans to the winds and sound the battle call; to set his steel-muscled Martians tearing at the bars and the cell doors, smashing at the brick walls.

But cold reason came in time to kill this mad plan. Even if the Martians were able to free the crew—which, in this triple thick bastion, was improbable—Wolf and his men would be at a disadvantage. They would be cut down by the armed guards in the narrow confines of the halls, and nothing but mass suicide would be accomplished.

Wolf set his jaw grimly and arose to pace the cell. He would have to wait. He still had the obligations of a leader. It was his duty to see that the others got the chance for which they waited. They had trusted him, had not gone berserk in the ship or during the marches to and from jail. They awaited his word as loyal men, and he could not betray them and see them cut to pieces in these dim jail corridors.

The minutes dragged by as hours; the hours, years. Finally Wolf was sure the day had become night, the night had passed, and another day had dawned. Finally there was the sound of heavy feet in the corridor.

Commands were barked and the cell doors thrown open, and Wolf and his crew emerged to face a hundred Tandorian soldiers lined up against the far wall. Each held a paragon poised and ready for instant use. There was fear in the eyes of the Tandorians, even though Wolf's crew was unarmed. They were ready to pour quick death into the ranks of the prisoners.

A captain near Wolf's cell barked out orders. "Halloran, you and your men are to be taken to New Rome. A transport platform is waiting on the roof. You'll march up the stairs in single file and board it. And remember, your lives are in your own hands."

Wolf shrugged. It was the same routine—almost the same words that had been used on the previous march-

es and a feeling of pride came to Wolf as he thought: We're unarmed—completely at their mercy. Yet they still fear us. And they'll fear us more before we're through.

He led his men, single file, up the curving stone stairs to the roof. There the flying platform hovered motionless a foot in the air. The crew of the *Space Wanderer II* climbed aboard under the guns of the Tandorian soldiers. The captain barked the order, "Lock the grav-plates," and Wolf's men secured themselves to the surface of the platform.

The guards stepped back and the platform, guided by remote control from within the prison, arose into the air and moved southward. The guards stayed on the prison roof. They would no longer be needed.

THERE WAS a voice in Wolf's ear and he turned his head to see Lars Anson anchored at his side. Lars said, "Cheer up, bossman. Why the sour face? This is just what we wanted, isn't it?"

"Pat's gone. She was taken out of the cell while I was before Ramed."

Lars' eyes went bleak and he swore under his breath. "I knew it couldn't last. Things were going too good. Something had to go wrong, but why did it have to happen to her?"

"I'll find her if I have to take this city apart brick by brick. And I'll find out who took her out of that cell. I'll get the dog. Creation isn't big enough to hold both of us."

"I know how you feel, Wolf, but you can't let it trip you. We've got to follow through with our plan. We've got to win free before we can do anything for Pat."

"It's too late to help her but I'll have bloody vengeance."

"You and me both. Are you ready to talk to the men? I think we'll have our chance when we land."

"I'm ready."

Lars laid a hand on Wolf's shoulder. "Fine! And—buck up, bossman. Maybe things aren't as bad as they seem."

The platform sailed over green hills and broad level farmland. There were rivers, silver ribbons, winding below. Then, on the horizon, there came into being a scene which would have fascinated Wolf if his mind had not been grimly preoccupied.

It was as if they had flown back in time—back through thousands of years—across the void to Earth and down the lush green of Europe to the boot stretching out into the Mediterranean Sea. There were no seven hills, where, ages before, Romulus and Remus had been suckled by a she-wolf. No hills, but otherwise it was identical. They were over Rome in the days when it was young, lusty and cruel. The proud white buildings glistened in the sun. The Appian Way stretched into the distance, and the arches of the Colosseum shouldered up into the sky. The Colosseum, symbol of greatness that was now dust. Hall-mark of a once mighty empire. It was there again, below them, as all of Rome was there below them: clean, new and pulsing with life.

The platform settled lower to skim the roof-tops and the populace of New Rome looked upward and cheered.

Lars' voice came, full of wonder. "Well I'll be damned if you weren't right! I believed you, of course, but I still had to see it. People walking around in short night-gowns. And women dressed for the bedroom. Great Gan! This Ramed is stark raving nuts!"

"Nuts maybe, but you've still got to hand it to him. This may be the mania of a madman, but it's real. He built it stone by stone and put each puppet in its place down there on the

streets. Ramed may be crazy, but he's got ability."

"Is that it down there? The place we're going to stage our little war?"

"That's it. The bloody Roman games all over again, four thousand years later."

"It sure isn't any clothes closet."

The platform was settling into a pit now; a pit into which it fitted exactly. It went down twenty feet between four walls forming a rectangle, settled on the floor, and there was the slight wheezing sound as the grays were turned off by remote control.

"They going to leave us down here?" Lars asked. "And no guards?"

"They don't need guards any more than they'd need them for a herd of cattle. See that section there? It will open and we'll walk into a dungeon where even a thousand Martians would be helpless. Then other doors will open, when the time comes, to let us into the arena."

"Well I'll be damned," Lars marveled. "A hundred fighting men, delivered on schedule, and untouched by human hands."

"That's about it. Just like the animal chutes at the zoo."

THE DOOR had opened now—a section of wall two feet thick swung back on hinges—and the crew of the *Space Wanderer* trooped into an enclosure covering at least an acre of ground, the walls of which rose up to a solid stone ceiling.

"Well," Lars said, "we got this far. Now it's up to you. Start telling them."

Wolf Halloran stood in the center of the enclosure and raised his arms. "Gather around, men. Come in close. I've something to say to you."

The first to reach Wolf was Latsos the Plutonian. He was in a glum mood. "Better make it good, Wolf. The men aren't in the best of moods.

They've been awaiting word from you for a long time. They want action."

The Martians came in and squatted down in a circle around Wolf. The Mercurians with their four arms each and their dark gloomy faces. The Plutonians, looking more like great cats than men. And overhead fluttered the Neptunians, their faces eternally wistful and sad.

"You've done well, men, and I'm proud of you," Wolf began. "Proud that you held yourselves in check and awaited leadership as you've always done in the past. Your strength and my leadership have made us an invincible fighting force, and that we will continue to be."

They were high-sounding words but somewhat meaningless under the circumstances, and a restless growl went up from the crew.

"At the moment, we're trapped behind stone walls, but I have a plan to free us all. I promise you freedom and vengeance, and in order to achieve it I'm going to ask you to do a strange thing. I'm going to ask you to do something that will come hard to myself as well as you, but it is our only chance."

"You know we follow your orders," Latsos said.

"Good. Before long, we are going out into the arena you saw from the platform. We're going out there to fight like animals on display. So far as Ramed is concerned, we *are* animals, and he is pitting us against another band of fighters for the amusement of himself and his Tandorians. They want to see someone defeated in battle, preferably us."

The snarls of the Martians was savage in anticipation. The cat-eyes of Latsos glowed. "At last! By the great Gan! A fight!"

"But we're going to lose that fight, men. That's the hard thing I'm asking you to do. I want you to be cow-

ards for this one important time. Rank cowards who crawl and cringe and refuse to fight."

A concerted gasp went up: "You mean you ask us to go out and be torn to pieces?" "You want us to be killed without raising a hand?"

"We will not be killed. Our foe will have orders to spare us if at all possible, and if we refuse to fight they will not kill us in cold blood. Because Ramed wants us for another purpose. We're to be carried to the public square in wooden cages to be spat upon by the crowd and left to die of hunger."

Wolf Halloran paused while a stunned silence prevailed. Then he said, "*Wooden cages!* Do you get that? Do you see what I mean?"

Lars Anson raised his hands. "The bossman is right. What good will it do to fight in that arena. Will that get us freedom? But once we're out in the public square—"

"I get the point," Latsos cut in. "I think we all do, but why must we lie down and whine? Why can't we at least give a good account of ourselves?"

"I have a reason for that," Wolf said. "Ramed wants to use the wooden cages because they fit in with a tradition that means much to him. That's the way it was done thousands of years ago. But he's no fool and he must be made to believe we have no fight in us. If we go in there and fight like wild men, we'll find ourselves locked up in steel traps that even the Martians can't break. Do you understand me? Can't you see it's the only thing to do?"

"You're right," Latsos growled. "You're right most of the time. But it's not going to be easy. This crew isn't used to lying down."

"This time you've got to."

Lars' practiced eye was studying the group. He slapped Wolf on the

shoulder. "They'll do it. They'll take their licking like men."

"Just watch me," Wolf said. "I'll set the pattern. I've never asked you to do anything I wouldn't do myself, and I'm not asking you now. Just live for the moment out there in the public square when you'll hear me yell: 'Death to Ramed!' Then we'll even up things quick!"

"They'll do it," Lars repeated. "Now let's sit down and chew our fingernails until curtain-time."

CHAPTER VI

Flesh For Sale

THE THING crouching on the floor was horrible, but after a time horror becomes a comparative thing. Pat did not scream. She stood frozen as the thing cackled and moved toward her. I've got to run, she told herself. I've got to rush past it and get away, back up the corridor. But her muscles refused to work, a haze of discouragement clouding her mind and dulling her reflexes.

The thing came closer and again it spoke. "Don't be afraid, honey. Old Clag won't hurt you. Old Clag likes visitors and knows how to treat them."

Obviously female, the thing was more defined now and Pat identified it as a small Tandorian crone: a hideous little sharp-faced witch whose back was a deformed arc, her spine bent in such an appalling manner that she appeared to be sitting on the floor and inching along on her haunches.

"Who—who are you?" Pat faltered.

"I'm Clag, honey. Just a harmless old woman who's lived in these pits and tunnels under the Chamber of the Dead for more years than you can count. And now a pert young girl comes visiting Old Clag. It's been a long time since—"

"How do you know I'm a girl?"

Again the cackle. "How does Clag know? Because she is smart—a lot smarter than most. When a pretty little creature like you turns quick and puts both hands on her breast and holds her knees close together, she's a girl. No boy would act that way."

"I see."

"But enough chatter. You're tired and hungry. Come to Clag's cave where there's food and fire and even hot water for a pert young trick to take a bath in."

The crone turned and moved up the tunnel in a queer crab-like hop. Pat hesitated for a moment, then followed. She was still frightened, but the lure of warmth, food and hot water was too much. And in spite of her hideousness, the misshapen hag seemed harmless.

Some fifty yards upward, a low dark opening previously unnoticed by Pat proved to be the entrance to Clag's cave. "This way, honey," the crone invited, and Pat found herself moving through a narrow passage so low of ceiling that she was obliged to bend almost double.

Not only horror but all things are comparative, and the warm smoky cavern into which Pat was led seemed like a snug and inviting oasis after days of wandering in a desert. In the exact center a cheerful fire glowed under a great pot of water. Two flares lit the cave and Pat could see all the appurtenances for crude but comfortable living.

"Come to the fire, honey, and warm your poor young bones. It's sharp cold out in those tunnels."

Pat came forward and extended her hands to the fire. Clag cackled cheerfully as she got a bucket from a nearby table and hopped back to the cauldron.

"Did you come through the Cham-

ber of the Dead, honey?"

"Yes, I didn't know where I was or where I was going. You see—"

Clag waved a hand in protest. "Don't say a word. Old Clag don't want to know your business. You come visiting Clag and little Corpy. That's all that's important."

"Little Corpy?"

"My son, honey. Hee-hee-hee. Old Clag doesn't look like she'd have a fine healthy son does she? But wait 'til he comes home and you see him. A fine lad, Corpy."

"I'm—I'm sure he is."

Clag had filled the bucket and was now hopping toward a curtained opening in the far wall of the cave. "Three or four buckets in the tub, honey, and you can lay back and soak to your heart's content. Old Clag'll take care of you."

THE WITCH went about her business with such certainty that Pat found no grounds for protest. She stood there soaking up the warmth of the fire until Clag's harsh voice called from beyond the wall. "In here now, honey, and into the tub. Old Clag's even got a bar of soap for you. Good soap, reserved for special guests."

It was in Pat's mind to refuse, but thoughts of a warm bath were too tempting to resist. After all, she thought, this creature, whoever she is, knows I'm a girl, so there's no use masquerading any longer. What harm can there be in getting some of the filth off my skin?

Pat crossed the cavern and went through the curtained opening. Beyond it she found a small room against one wall of which was a bathtub cut out of solid rock. A cloud of warm steam bloomed upward, and a bar of white soap lay on the edge of the tub.

Clag cackled proudly. "All the

comforts of home, honey. Clag found this cave years ago and knew it was just the place where she could live like a lady and bring up her son to be real quality. Into the tub now, honey. Do you want Clag to help you with your clothes?"

"No—no thank you. I can manage."

"Of course you can. Modesty. That's what I like to see in a young girl. There's too little of it in this day and age. Stay in as long as you want to and if you need anything, just call Clag. She'll be getting supper by the fire."

Pat watched the crone hobble out. The curtain settled into place and was still. Two minutes later, Pat was luxuriating in the blessed warmth of the tub. She relaxed completely, closed her eyes and gave herself over to the complete pleasure of the moment. Her eyes closed, her tired body seemed a thing apart from her, and a haze drifted over her mind. She dozed.

There followed what she could have classified as hazy reality or a sojourn in the half-world of dreams: A sound—plodding footsteps from somewhere, and then a harsh whispering voice:

"You've been long enough! Did you get the money? How much did they pay?"

A tinkling, as of coins dropped on a table, then a second voice—surly. "That for the two of them, and it's not enough."

"Not nearly enough! And they were such good specimens. You didn't dawdle along and let them stiffen?"

"No. I hurried. There was at least six hours of laxness in them, but I tell you it's getting bad. Good ones—the kind they want—are getting harder to find as the days go by. And the patrols. What if I'm caught by a patrol?"

A cackling laugh. "Never mind that. I've got a surprise for you. One

that will make your heart sing songs."

"A surprise? What is it?"

"We have a guest with us. A guest asleep in the tub—"

The cloud was thickening over Pat's mind and now she was struggling to free herself from the grip of a bad dream. It was a weird mad mixture of all the hours that had gone before; evil faces and leering eyes. But in the center of the dream was the tall figure of Wolf Halloran, fighting the demons, driving through to save Pat from destruction.

Wolf never made it because, the next thing Pat knew, someone was shaking her shoulder and she opened her eyes to see Clag's evil face close to hers.

"Wake up, honey. Clag's got a surprise for you; one that would do any young girl's heart good. You get out of the water and dry yourself off while Clag goes after it."

PAT GOT out of the tub and tow-eled herself furiously, then as she heard Clag's returning footsteps, she stood waiting, using the towel as a garment. A moment later she was wide-eyed and gasping because—never in her life—had she seen such a beautiful robe.

Clag held it forth, spread over one arm and the crone's eyes were bright, birdlike, as she watched Pat's reaction. "While you were sleeping, I sent Corpy out to get this for you. It's a robe any high-born Tandorian woman would be proud of, honey. Or, I suspect, any high-born Earth woman as well."

The robe was of richest satin. It was replete with the most careful hand stitching. A row of silver buttons ran down the front clear to the sweeping hem, and the lines of the gown could have been conceived only by a master modiste.

"But—but where did it come from?"

How—"

The everlasting cackle. "We got resources, Corpy and me. And any guest of ours is treated like royalty. Corpy got it for you, honey, and he'll be hurt if you don't put it on. So you get dressed and then come out. Supper is ready and Corpy is waiting to meet you."

The hag turned away. Then she stopped and came back toward the bathtub. Too late, Pat realized what drew her there as Clag extended a claw-like hand and picked up the slim dagger Pat had carried concealed against her breast.

"What's this, now—what's this?"

"It's—it's mine. I carry it to pro—"

"Of course! Of course! Clag understands. A young girl has got to be careful in this dangerous city. You'd better keep this little dagger at hand all the time. You'll find a pocket in the gown where it will fit snugly."

With that, Clag handed the blade to Pat and toad-hopped through the curtains. After she had left, Pat held the robe over one arm and stroked its soft folds. It was so beautiful. She glanced down at her own dirty, ragged garments. They were more practical of course and she would don them again. But this beautiful gown. Why couldn't she wear it for a little while? After all, she mustn't insult these people. She was grateful to them and she must show it.

A high happy cackle from Clag greeted Pat's entrance into the larger cave. "Ha! Now if that isn't a sight to warm Clag's old heart. And yours too, Corpy. Get on your feet like a gentleman and greet our guest!"

From a stone ledge by the wall, a young oafish-looking Tandorian came erect and gazed at Pat.

"This is Corpy—my son. Corpy, this beautiful creature is Patricia Ransom, an Earth girl who has come to visit us. Bow to her Corpy."

The young Tandorian managed a stiff bow and as he gazed at Pat his eyes brightened. When he turned them, with a questioning look, to his mother, they transformed his face, making him look almost intelligent.

"And now supper," Clag said. "You sit here, honey, between Clag and Corpy so's we can see you don't want for a thing."

Pat sat down. She'd half expected the food to turn her stomach. But this was not the case. The dishes on the stone table were sparkling clean and the clear green soup before her looked appetizing.

It tasted as good as it looked and Pat emptied the bowl of its contents in short order. She was laying down her spoon when a strange lax feeling came over her.

"Are you ill, my dear?"

PAT TURNED to her hostess and strove to answer, but the words would not come. A strange numbness invaded her brain. Yet, oddly, her mind was clear. It simply refused to function. It was like the motor of an engine—a motor thrown into neutral. It performed all the functions of consciousness but had no way of directing movement.

Pat's eyes found those of Clag and the sight chilled her. The look of ugly amiability was gone. Here, watching her, was a cold-eyed evil-faced fiend, her inner bestiality no longer covered up by a mask of pretense. When Clag spoke, her voice was harsh and cruel.

"What do you think, Corpy? Isn't this a prize for fair?"

The youth's eyes were bright, brittle, greedy. He got to his feet and those eyes narrowed with purpose. "Stand up!" he said sharply.

Pat got slowly to her feet. It was as if his words by-passed her brain and went directly to her muscles in inexorable command.

"Turn around."

Pat began turning. She moved completely about four times before the next order came.

"Stop. Walk to the wall. Then turn and walk back."

Pat did as she was ordered. As she stopped, back at the table, helpless thoughts were pitching through her mind: That dream—the things she'd heard while in the bathtub. No dream at all, but reality. Clag had been talking to her son and Pat's blood ran cold. What were the *things* they'd discussed; the things Corpy sold; the things that stayed lax for a time and were valueless after they stiffened. Nausea whirled through Pat's helpless body. Then Corpy spoke again.

"Walk to the couch. Lie down on it. Go to sleep."

Pat obeyed the command like the automaton she'd become. Stretched on the couch, she closed her eyes and all her terror vanished. But sleep did not come instantly, and the voices of her captors drifted into her ears.

"What did you do that for?"

"To get her out of the way. We don't just take this one out and offer her around. I must go and talk to some people—the right people. Tell them what I have."

"All right, but hurry."

"I'll be back inside an hour."

As Pat drifted into unconsciousness there was a last thought in her clouded brain: "Wolf—Wolf Halloran. Oh, my darling—where are you? Why don't you come to me?"

CHAPTER VII

Ave Nero!

WOLF HALLORAN and his crew stood in a group at one end of the vast arena. Behind them the iron gate through which they'd just passed clanged shut. They blinked in the unaccustomed light, then gazed about in

wonder at the colorful scene.

A high wall encircled the area, and from the top of this wall rows of stone benches scaled one above another until the last tiers were hard against the stately arches for which the original Roman Colosseum was famous.

While upon the benches was a mass of color and humanity such as even Wolf himself had never before seen packed into one place. It was savagely beautiful, this reincarnation of the old Roman scene. Brilliant coloring met the eye in every direction and, as Wolf and his men appeared, a roar went up. It was the blood roar of the assembled Roman populace; the cruel scream of the Roman plebeian who thrived on bread and games.

"That must be Ramed himself," Lars Anson said. "To the left of the center. See where the big banner hangs clear to the floor of the arena?"

"Where Nero and the Caesars sat," Wolf Halloran replied, and there was something in his voice that made Lars Anson glance up. Though Lars didn't know it, Wolf had been greatly affected by the scene. To him it was like stepping back into a long dead age, and a man of Wolf's sensibilities could hardly escape the impact of it.

"Never heard of 'em," Lars said. "But I'll bet my pants the fat blob in the prize seat is Ramed." Lars scowled and glanced back at the iron gate. "Well, what happens now? When do the festivities start?"

"Any minute now."

As Wolf spoke, another gate opened at the side of the arena and a strange vehicle—a large cart on two solid wooden wheels and drawn by a pair of oxen—creaked into view and moved toward Wolf and his crew. The cart drew abreast of them and two attendants dressed in togas threw two armfuls of vicious looking short-swords

down on the sands at Wolf's feet.

One of the attendants called down: "Your foemen are coming out now at the far end of the arena. Watch them approach Nero and make the salute, because when they retire you're to do the same thing. And when you raise your swords, be sure to call out: 'We, who are about to die, salute you.' Do you understand that?"

Lars frowned and nudged Wolf. "What does he mean? I've got no intention of dying."

"Quiet," Wolf hissed. Then, to the attendant: "We understand."

"Then do as you're told or it will go hard with you. Pick up your short-swords now."

THE WAGON went away as it had come and the roar of the crowd welled up anew as a gate at the far end of the arena opened and a new group of warriors entered the arena. "Tandorians!" Wolf snapped.

Lars whistled in surprise. "And what Tandorians! I never knew they grew that big."

"Ramed's making an issue of it. I expected him to put us against a force of fighting monstrosities from the planetoids, but he wants his people to see us bested by their own kind."

Lars grinned. "You know—I've got an idea he doesn't think much of our ability as fighting men." Then Lars sobered at the grim look on Wolf's face.

"I don't like this," Wolf muttered. "Why not? What's wrong?"

"I don't know exactly. It's just a feeling I have. You say Ramed underestimates us. I think we've been the fools in underestimating him. After all, he's clever. Is he going to let us get away with our plan or does he see through it?"

"This is a swell time to be wondering," Lars said. Then both men were silent as they watched the Tandori-

ans approach the center of the arena, turn smartly and march to the high wall where they stood looking up at the figure above the great flaming banner hanging down to the arena floor. They stood erect and a hundred flashing short-swords were raised at one. The crowd was suddenly stilled to catch their words, and the salute was made:

"We, who are about to die, salute you!"

The figure above raised a hand and the ground shook from the applause of the crowd. The Tandorians lowered their weapons and marched away to the far end of the arena from whence they had come.

"I guess it's our turn," Lars said. "Let's go over and say hello to the fat slob."

"All right, men," Wolf called. "Follow me. Do as I do."

They were a strange assemblage, this crew of the *Space Wanderer*, as they moved up the sands toward the center of the arena. The Plutonians slinking along, radiating hatred with every movement; the stolid Martians with every semblance of the oxen which had lately drawn the cart; the Mercurians, swinging their four arms in rhythm, their red eyes perpetually narrowed; and the Neptunian bird-men who found the sands hard going and used their wings to carry them along in short, jerky hops.

And if there was hatred in the *Wanderer's* crew, it was given back a thousandfold by the crowds above. Lars looked up in surprise as the savage roar hit his eardrums. "They'd sure like to tear us to pieces," he snarled. "But I wonder if they'd like to come down in groups of two hundred and have it out with us."

"We'll deal with some of them later," Wolf snapped.

"We hope to, that is," Lars replied.

They had reached the center sands now, and they turned to approach the banner. The fifty yards dwindled and they were now near the banner-covered wall.

"All right, men," Lars called out. "Heist your pig-stickers and we'll speak our little piece."

The swords were raised and the words went up in unison:

"We, who are about to die, salute you!"

Only Wolf Halloran remained silent. He raised his sword with the rest, but then his eyes centered upon the box in which Ramed sat in lazy arrogance. As the other short-swords were lowered, Wolf remained unmoving, his weapon still pointed at the box.

Lars nudged him. "Let down, boss-man. That's all there is to it. You can't blast him with that thing."

Wolf's lips moved stiffly. "Great Gan! Am I seeing things? Look up there! Look close! Tell me what you see."

Now Lars too was frozen. Then he also spoke. "Well, I'll be doubly damned and fried in shrak butter! Maybe we've both gone blind."

And from above, Ramed sneered down at them, the perfect picture of smug triumph.

PAT HAD awakened from her sleep to a feeling of pain. The pain came again and she identified it. Someone was slapping her sharply on the cheek. Then a harsh, grating voice said:

"Wake up, honey. Wake up!"

Pat opened her eyes to see Clag and Corpy bending over her. Clag's hideous face was twisted into a frown as she glanced at her son. "Will that hynotic stuff wear off? Do you think we should pour some more into her?"

Corpy shook his head. "No. It's too dangerous. Any more and we'd

have just another dead one on our hands. I'll be able to handle her easy."

"Well, get her out of here then. It's dark enough now. No one will see you."

Pat felt herself not asleep but still in some weird sort of dream state. Without question, she knew she must obey Corpy's orders. He said, "Get up and follow me. Walk where I walk."

Pat made one last effort to reassume command of herself. It was no use. She arose from the couch and stood motionless, waiting. Corpy grinned at his mother, then turned and walked toward the exit tunnel. Pat fell into step behind him. As they went through the tunnel, she heard the crone's cracked laughter following. "Hee-hee-hee. Now if that isn't gratitude to old Clag for what she's done. Walking away without a thank-you or a goodbye. That's gratitude for you. Hee-hee-hee."

The nightmare-voice faded and the silence of the caves wrapped itself around Pat—broken only by Corpy's heavy footsteps and the light, brushing sound of her own.

It seemed to Pat that they were traveling in a different direction from that in which she'd entered this devil's pit. The Chamber of the Dead, she felt, was the other way. And this proved true when Corpy pushed through a small opening in a blank, windowless wall, and they were standing in a dark street.

But there was no hesitation on the part of the Tandorian. He knew exactly where he was going, and after a succession of dark winding streets, he stopped to knock on what was evidently a door.

He waited and knocked a second time, then the door opened. Corpy turned to Pat and said, "Walk inside."

Pat, eyes straight ahead, did as she was bidden. She saw a tall bearded Tandorian standing in the center of a well furnished room. It was a clean modern apartment to which Corpy had brought her and obviously this Tandorian had been awaiting their arrival.

He was directly in front of Pat and she saw his eyes light up with appreciation at sight of her. She walked straight toward him and would no doubt have walked into him had not Corpy's command halted her. She stood motionless, the Tandorian almost touching her as he stared with burning eyes.

"Well," Corpy said, "there she is. Did I lie?"

The Tandorian spoke for the first time. "She's certainly not a dead one. May I look her over?"

HE REACHED out and began unbuttoning the front of Pat's robe. She felt his fingers touching her flesh. Violent revulsion assailed her but it was as if this body he touched was not hers, but rather an impersonal, lifeless property which some merchant was inspecting while she stood by.

"Just a minute," Corpy said. "I think it's about time I saw some money."

The Tandorian stepped back. "It's a shame that I'm a poor man who can't afford luxuries," he said. "A sorry business when a man must always think of his pocketbook."

Corpy grinned. "I feel exactly the same way about it. Selling this delectable piece comes hard, but a man must live."

"And of course, there *are* the other ones."

"The temporary ones, yes. And now about the money?"

The Tandorian drew a pouch from the folds of his lounging robe and

handed it to Corpy. "The price agreed upon," he said. "In platinum. And if you find another like this one—"

"I think she's the only one in existence."

"How long will the drug be effective?"

"Another twelve hours at least." Corpy turned to Pat and his voice hardened. "You will obey this man now. He is your master. His will is your will. Speak, and tell me you understand."

"His will is my will," Pat said, and as she spoke she felt that the voice was not her own.

After Corpy left, the Tandorian stood looking at Pat for some time. Then he again reached out and began unbuttoning her robe. But after a moment he dropped his hands and stepped back. "No. A man is a fool to tempt himself. She is to be delivered unspoiled and they would know. They are very clever. I must curb my appetites and dwell upon the knowledge that my fortune is made."

He crossed the room toward an inner doorway, then turned back to Pat. "Sit there on that chair. I will be back shortly." Pat did as she was ordered and though the Tandorian was gone for several minutes, it did not occur to her to attempt escape.

When the Tandorian returned, he was dressed for the street. He led Pat out into the darkness where a conveyance was waiting. Pat paid no attention to its nature, nor to the fact that the windows were heavily curtained and that there was a general air of secrecy about this trip.

The Tandorian got in beside her and there was no sound as the vehicle moved swiftly toward its destination. When it came to a stop, the Tandorian said, "You will close your eyes now, my dear." Then for some reason of his own, he added an ex-

planation. "That is necessary in case the—person we are to meet does not want you. Then I must take you back and you will not know where you have been. They are very careful, these aristocrats."

He helped Pat from the carriage and his voice was wistful. "As a matter of truth, my dear, I almost hope he *doesn't* want you. Then— But come this way."

There was no curiosity in the girl. She felt no urge to open her eyes and the voices around her were of no concern whatsoever. The first was that of a woman.

"Have her stand here. The High Lord will first view her from seclusion."

A time of waiting passed and then the woman's voice again, this time with an undertone of excitement:

"The High Lord is pleased. He will come in person."

The Tandorian's voice: "I am indeed honored!"

The sound of footsteps, then a booming arrogant voice, overshadowing any Pat had heard: "Great Gan! This is amazing! I can't believe it. Where in all Gaul did you find a jewel like this?"

The Tandorian replied, "Will my Lord permit me to be frank at the risk of endangering my worthless life?"

"Speak man—speak!"

"I can say only this: My Lord trusts my discretion. I am honored to have his confidence, mainly because I can be trusted to be discreet at all times—to hold my tongue. Therefore, if I answered my Lord fully, I would betray the confidence of the ones with whom I dealt and therefore no longer merit—"

The other had evidently been in private meditation. His voice came now as though his train of thought had been interrupted. "Eh? Eh?

What's that? What are you babbling about?"

"I was merely telling my Lord—"

"Speak when you're spoken to! I care not where this gem comes from! I know only this: She is an Earthwoman. A beautiful Earthwoman, and with her I can fulfill one of my greatest ambitions! An Inner Planet woman for my Empress. She will sit beside me on a golden throne! She will bear me sons— You! What are you standing there for? Be on your way!"

"But, my Lord. The price. If the girl proved satisfactory, your emissary agreed—"

There was a sound of quick agony from the Tandorian; a strangled scream and a moan of pain as a weight fell to the floor. A moment of silence, then: "Take this bloody knife and throw it away. It killed the scum who laid hands on your future Empress. And have that carrion dragged away."

The woman's voice: "Yes, my Lord."

"Take her into your care. Anoint her with rare oils and treat her as a goddess. We leave for New Rome in the morning. She and I. There at the great games the people of Rome will look upon her beauty."

"Yes, my Lord."

And Pat felt a gentle hand close over her own. There was no command this time as the woman led her away.

CHAPTER VIII

Wolf Halloran's Cowards

LARS' ANSON'S voice beat urgently into Wolf Halloran's ear: "You've got to buck up, bossman! Get a hold on yourself! That's Pat, all right, but there's nothing we can do about it. We don't know how she got there or what it's all about and that wall is too high to go up and find out. We can only do one thing at a time and right now we got a job on

our hands."

Wolf Halloran lowered his sword and turned a grim, agonized face on his second-in-command. "But how could such a thing happen? How did he find out about her?"

"That's easy enough to answer. But the main thing is to remember that she could be dead—beaten, raped and tortured—but she hasn't been. She's alive and safe. Come on, we've got a job to do."

While he argued with Wolf, Lars had been herding the crew out into the arena and hauling Wolf along by the arm. Now his voice became more urgent. "Snap out of it, Wolf. You've got to lead the men in this thing. They're looking to you. If you lose your head, we're done for."

With a sharp effort, Wolf tore his mind out of the quagmire into which it had stumbled and forced it to embrace the present moment. The crew was out in the middle of the arena now, and Wolf raised his sword. "All right, men. This is where we stand or fall. We're supposed to charge out and meet them when the signal is given. They'll charge by, we won't. From now on, just watch me."

Even Wolf himself did not catch the signal, but at that moment a roar went up from the crowd and the platoon of Tandorians at the far end of the arena charged forward with swords raised, screaming their battle cry.

Wolf and his crew stood rooted to the ground. Then, as the Tandorians came close, Wolf dropped his sword and turned to flee. Stunned silence from the benches greeted his move. He found himself blocked off by his own men. In an apparent frenzy of fear, he plowed through them, knocking them this way and that; plowed through them and took off for the far end of the arena.

And so the populace of New Rome

were treated to the spectacle of Wolf Halloran's crew following their chief in utter panic. Wolf, glancing over his shoulder, saw each of his men grimly following the most distasteful orders he'd ever given them, and his heart was full of pride. Where in all space could a man find another such crew as this? Heroes all—these loyal fighters who fled along in his wake.

The Tandorians had expected nothing like this. With Wolf and his crew in full flight, the men of Ramed stopped running and stared after them in utter consternation. They looked questioningly at the captain who led them, and this wily and seasoned fighter, also at a loss, looked up at the great Ramed as though seeking leadership.

THE CITIZENS of New Rome were stricken mute. From the jammed tiers encircling the arena, there came dead silence. This was a spectacle of cowardice the like of which they had never seen and still could not believe.

Wolf, noting that the Tandorians had ceased pursuit, brought his own men to a halt and the two groups stood motionless some fifty yards apart.

Immediately, the Tandorian captain urged his men forward, whereupon the spectacle of a few moments before, was repeated. At the far end of the arena, Wolf reversed himself, drew his men into a circling movement back around the Tandorians, and then lit out for the other end of the arena.

The spectators found their voices now. A chuckle broke out, to be followed by another; the shrill giggle of a woman was heard. Then the jam-packed stadium was rocked by gales of derisive laughter as the Tandorians pursued their foemen up and down the arena. Ten minutes elapsed during

which time the Tandorian populace became weak from laughter and the Tandorian fighters exhausted from pursuing a swifter enemy.

Finally the Tandorians struggled to a halt in front of Ramed's box and the captain looked up apologetically as though to intimate that he and his men could not defeat an enemy they could not catch.

At the far end of the arena, Wolf and his men came also to a wary halt near the gate through which they had been herded into the arena.

The novelty of the spectacle had worn off now, and the spectators were becoming impatient. Cries went up:

"Enough of this clowning!"

"Get on with the games!"

"Burn the cowards alive!"

Then the iron gate was opened and the ordeal of Wolf and his men was over.

"A good thing," Lars gasped. "I don't think they could have held out much longer. Another trip around would have ended this comedy and a lot of Tandorians wouldn't have known what hit them."

"They followed orders," Wolf said. "I'm proud of them, and it won't be long now before they get a bellyful of fighting."

The gate into the enclosure from which they'd come was closed now and a second gate had been opened. This led into a stone tunnel at the far end of which Wolf and his crew found a smaller area, surrounded by walls some ten feet in height and open entirely to the blue sky above. It was somewhat like the pit into which the flying platform had been lowered, but smaller and with no platform waiting.

Lars Anson scowled, "I wonder what this means? Why weren't we sent back to where we came from? Do you think our plan misfired?"

"I doubt it," Wolf replied. "We

created exactly the right impression. There isn't one spectator out there who doesn't think us rank cowards. Every one of them is looking forward to poking us with sticks and spitting in our faces."

Lars grinned in anticipation. "When they parade us out in those wooden cages and you give the Martians the signal—Great Gan! They'll be treated to a spectacle all right. Cages coming apart like tissue paper."

But Wolf's mind was on something else. "Pat in that creature's clutches! What could have happened, Lars? How could he have gotten his hands on her?"

Lars shrugged. "Who can tell? You found her missing in the jail. Evidently the guard did spot her as a girl and Ramed must have gotten wind of it. She's a lovely thing and Ramed would like nothing better than to have an Earth girl for a queen or an empress. We know that much."

Wolf had dropped to his knees, head bent like a groggy fighter, his forehead pressed into his hands. Lars pulled him erect. "Courage, man! Courage! We're still alive and closer to our goal than ever! Luck won't desert us now. We'll get to Pat if we have to take this city apart stone by stone. Courage!"

BUT IT seemed that luck had indeed deserted Wolf and his crew because, at that moment, there was the sound of approaching footsteps and a group of figures appeared along the wall above the pit. Wolf and his men looked up to see Ramed standing in the center of the group, looking down at them.

There was a sneer on Ramed's fat face, but only cold intelligence in his eyes. "Ho there, Wolf Halloran! And how do I impress you as a Caesar—as Nero, great master of all Rome? Speak up! Am I Nero, or am I not?"

"At least, Ramed, you are as much of a beast as he was."

"And I have a brain of even greater brilliance. For instance—do you think I was taken in by your performance out there?"

Lars whispered, "Great Gan! We're finished."

Wolf called out, "I don't follow you, Ramed."

"You follow me, cunning Earthman. You'd like nothing better than to make me think you abject cowards. You yearn for the wooden cages and a parade to the public square."

"I imagined that was in store for us."

Ramed laughed. "It is, but all your clever acting goes for naught. Do you think I'm deceived, you fool? Do you think you can make me believe a band of cringing cowards could gain a reputation such as yours? You'll go into the public square but in specially constructed cages that will hold helpless even your Martians."

Wolf's crew, upon hearing these words, threw all pretense to the winds and a howl of rage went up. The catmen hissed and sought to climb the walls in their frenzy. One of the Martians seized a protruding stone and bellowed in rage as he tried to tear it loose. But the stone crumbled to powder in his hands.

Then, out of the seething group in the pit, there arose two forms—two Neptunian birdmen who had not let anger cloud their brains. Up they went, screaming and circling as though in unreasoning frustration, but with a plan behind their movements; a plan which the group on the wall discovered too late. While the attendants stood frozen, unable to react, the two birdmen swooped upward in an arc, then downward, to hit Ramed squarely in the back and send him tumbling into the pit.

A roar went up from below and

Wolf and Lars, joining in the shout of elation, caught the fat body of Ramed, jerked him erect and held him helpless.

Wolf's crew surged forward, each man vying for the honor of rending Ramed to bits, but Wolf's sharp voice drove them back. "Not yet! Not yet! We have use for this fat Nero. And maybe he has use for us."

Wolf twisted Ramed's hate-filled face around until he could stare into his eyes. "What now, Tandorian? The tables are turned. What now?"

RAMED writhed, helpless in the grip of the Earthmen. "You shall all die!" he panted. "Each of you shall die slowly in such torture as you never dreamed possible!"

Above them, the wall had become crowded with bewildered Tandorians and a semblance of courage came into Ramed's face. "What chance do you have? Stop this nonsense and release me. Then possibly I shall be merciful."

"Mercy! Pah! We are about to die, Ramed, but you go first. A Martian shall do it, I think. I'll have a Martian take your skull in his hands and squeeze it very slowly—very slowly, Ramed, and we shall see how courageously you can die in front of your subjects."

Wolf motioned and a Martian waddled forward to lay his huge hand on Ramed's head.

"Gently," Wolf said. "Crush it very slowly. The Tandorians love blood and suffering. They will no doubt wish to gloat on the color of their Emperor's brains."

Ramed writhed anew in the iron grip. As the great hand settled over his skull, he screamed in anguish: "No! Hold! Hold! You can't do this to me! I am willing to bargain."

"I will make only one deal," Wolf said harshly. "Our freedom for your

life. That, and Patricia Ransom returned to us, unharmed.

Ramed scowled. "Your freedom, but nothing more!"

"At least he has courage," Lars said with grudging admiration. "With his skull in the grip of a Martian, he still makes his own terms."

"And you'll have to take them!" Ramed snarled. "Freedom is sweet to doomed men. You dare not kill me in the face of that offer because I am worthless to you dead. You must accept my terms."

"Freedom in what form?" Wolf asked.

"You will be given what you plotted for. You'll be turned loose in the streets. Once loose in New Rome, you will free me. And if that is not satisfactory, then kill me and be damned to you!"

"He's smart, this fat Tandorian," Lars said. "He knows we will accept. After all it's what we were after in the first place."

"How do you know we'll let you go, once we're out of here?" Wolf asked.

Ramed smiled. "I know the men with whom I deal. I'll take your word, Wolf Halloran. You have a foolish concern for your reputation of keeping agreements. You will keep our bargain."

Wolf scowled. "You know too much, damn you! All right! The bargain is made. Release us!"

"Open the gate!" Ramed called out to the Tandorians above. "I am arranging a treat for you. I am arranging to turn these scoundrels over to your tender mercies in the streets of New Rome. We'll have games such as even the true Romans never saw. Open the gates and prepare to wreak vengeance upon these who have laid hands on your Emperor!"

A cry went up from above and the gate swung open.

Pushing Ramed along before them, Wolf and Lars led the eager crew through the gate and down the passageway to another gate. This too was thrown open and they went out into the narrow avenue leading to freedom.

With the Tandorians moving backward before them, they traversed this avenue and moved out into the public square.

The Tandorians, still fearful for the life of their Emperor, pressed still further back, and shouts were heard:

"Release him, you cringing cowards, or is your word as false as your fighting spirit?"

A worried look passed over Ramed's face. "Be not misled!" he screamed. "These men are not cravens. They will not run while you throw stones at them. Be not fooled by what happened in the arena!"

But the Tandorians merely laughed. "Release our Emperor and we will be lenient. We will merely daub your faces with mud and chase you out of New Rome!"

"This is as far as we can go," Wolf said grimly. He pushed Ramed roughly forward, into the cleared area. "All right, Nero. We've kept our word. Get back with your scum!"

As Ramed staggered for balance and then ran toward the waiting Tandorians, Wolf turned to his crew. "I have only one word for you now. That word is—survival. You know how we fight. Battle to survive!"

And an eager roar went up behind him.

THE HELPLESS nightmare through which Pat Ransom had passed took on an even more fantastic hue as she opened her eyes to see the Tandorian dead on the floor of the palace. The bloody knife in the hand of the Tandorian's murderer did not impress her nearly as much as the murderer himself.

Ramed!

In her state of helplessness, she could still follow events and reason was still alive within her. Ramed! She had been bought, through a series of transactions, like a prize animal, by the Emperor himself. She had been purchased by this fiend to sate his lust and satisfy his overweening ego. She was to be a queen, an empress, and the thought was sickening as she visualized the days ahead with this sadistic beast.

As she was led away by the elderly Tandorian woman, she felt that her mind was somewhat clearer now—that she was again becoming master of herself to some extent. But there was still no great urge for resistance.

She allowed herself to be undressed and eased into a tub of fragrant water. As she lay back and closed her eyes, the fragrance of rich perfume came to her, and the soft strains of muted music filled the air.

Pat opened her eyes and looked around her. The Tandorian woman had assistants now, several ugly Tandorian maidens who were experts at their calling. With gentle hands, they rubbed the pain and weariness from her body.

Why, she thought, must it be this way? Why must all Tandorian women be of such extreme ugliness? Had they been beautiful, then possibly Earth girls would not be such prizes. Then, Pat thought dreamily, I would only be killed. A quick clean death, rather than a prize upon which evil hungry men yearn to satisfy their lust.

Thinking thus, she drifted off to a more natural sleep than she'd enjoyed in a long time and awakened refreshed in body if not in mind.

The Tandorian woman again took charge and soon Pat was clothed in rich and beautiful garments and led with much ceremony to the roof of the palace where an ornate air car

awaited her.

Ramed, resplendent in the finery of of an ancient race, was awaiting her. He handed her in beside him with pompous gestures and a grandiloquent manner. Seated beside him, Pat looked up into the fat licentious face and shuddered under her rich robes.

He said, "Today, my dear, I have arranged a great circus for your amusement. Also, I will lay a great city at your feet; a city I built as an exact duplicate of an Earth city long in ruins. Did you ever read of ancient Rome, my dear?"

"I—I have heard of it."

"Today, you will see it, in all its glory. You will view New Rome as its future queen, and all its citizens will pay you homage."

THE CAR moved smoothly into the air and Pat was swiftly transported through scenes of such strangeness that they occupied her mind completely. A city of odd and yet beautiful architecture. Great stately buildings of stone that gleamed white as snow in the sun. The car settled down on the roof of one of these buildings. She was handed from her seat and the car took off immediately leaving her with Ramed.

"Nothing modern is allowed to contaminate the glory of my city," Ramed explained. "The ancient Romans were the finest race of men ever created and we conform strictly to their pattern. Those people really *lived*, and we, following in their footsteps, live exactly as they did."

Pat was not allowed to walk down the broad stairs into the palace proper. A peculiar couch awaited her, from which protruded four handles. These were grasped by four slaves who carried the couch as though it supported the wealth of all worlds. Another couch supported Ramed, and they were carried into a great banquet hall

where the tables were laden with food.

Pat sat silent through the banquet that followed, scarcely touching the delicacies set before her. Ramed, engulfed in his own ego, did not seem to notice her preoccupation, so busy was he in accepting the adoration and homage of the hundreds of guests about him.

When the meal was finished and a great many of the guests were reeling from drunkenness, the slaves again appeared with the couches and Ramed got to his feet, holding a wine bowl high.

"And now to the games! On to the circus, loyal subjects! I have provided you with a rare treat this afternoon—one that will live long in your memory!"

The banquet hall was quitted with great shouting and a magnificent show of hilarity. To Pat, most of it was part of the same old dream. The ride through the streets with strangely dressed people filling the walks. And all up and down the city there was the air of festivity, of perpetual holiday.

In Pat's mind was the continual wonder: What sort of a mad world is this? What trick of fate has hurled me into it? And where will all this madness end?

She had long since given up thinking of Wolf Halloran as being among the living. There was a great certainty within her that the man she loved was dead. She dared not think of him because with such thoughts came the vision of how he had probably died—in the midst of torture beyond description—reduced to a gibbering, senseless thing by the diabolical practices for which the Tandorians were noted.

So she strove not to think of Wolf as she was taken to the great arena and placed on a luxurious couch beside Ramed. She was no longer interested in the pageantry and the nov-

elty of the scene about her. She closed her eyes and lowered her head in complete discouragement. Then she felt Ramed's fat hand under her chin, raising her head.

"Open your eyes, my dear. An old friend of yours is watching you. Look down there."

Pat looked obediently down into the arena and the blood went cold in her veins. Wolf Halloran! Lars Anson! And all the crew of the *Wanderer* standing down there with stubby little knives pointed upward.

Ramed's voice: "You must keep your eyes open. I want you to see every moment of this, as well as what will follow later in the public square. I want the picture in your mind. You can dwell upon it later, my dear—to-night, when you lie with me on our couch—when you become mine at last."

Pat scarcely heard the words. Ramed turned away, his attention on the men in the arena. Pat watched also, unable to pull her eyes from the spectacle that followed.

Wolf and his men fleeing like cravens from the Tandorians! Now she *knew* this was all a dream. Wolf and his crew running up and down the arena with the Tandorians in pursuit. Pat's head swam; her eyes closed and she lost track of events. When her mind cleared again, Wolf and his crew were not in the arena, nor was Ramed seated beside her on the couch.

Down below two Planetoid monstrosities were tearing each other to pieces amid the bestial snarls and cries of both themselves and the spectators. The games had started in all their bloody horror. Finally one of the fighters killed the other and staggered away only to fall himself and writhe in agony just before death took him out of his misery.

But now there was a change in the

crowd; a stirring as some outside interest gripped them. Pat looked up to see many of them hurrying down the tiers toward the end of the arena. She took little interest other than to be aware of some new activity. She closed her eyes again and tried to tell herself that all this did not exist. Time passed.

Then she was pulled roughly to her feet by a Tandorian underlord and the woman who had been in her attendance. The man made no effort to be gentle.

"On your feet. Hurry!"

Pat strained against his grip. "What do you want? Where are we going?"

"Back to Ramed's palace. You're to wait for him there. Things have gone bad for the Emperor and I pity you. He'll be in such a rage when he arrives at the palace that you'll wish you'd never been born. I've seen how Ramed treats his women when rage is on him. Yours will be a dark fate indeed, Earth girl!"

CHAPTER IX

Vale Nero

THE TANDORIANS were indeed gleeful. Many times they had watched the games of Ramed—had seen all the various methods of satiating blood lust which the dark agents of the Tandorian leader could devise. But this was the first time they had ever been allowed to participate in the drama.

And with such personal safety too. Thousands of eager Tandorians against a handful of inner planetary cowards. Had not the latter proved themselves to be such? Had they not run like panicked vermin from the fine, upstanding Tandorian opponents which Ramed had set against them?

Truly this would be great sport—descending en masse on this handful

of rabble, and vying for the honor of kicking and beating them into unrecognizable shapes.

This, to their eternal misfortune, was the judgment of the Tandorians. And such was the situation that they did not speedily learn of their mistake.

With deadly ferocity, Wolf's band formed itself into the old pattern: a death-dealing wedge spearheaded by Wolf and Lars. The weird battle cries sounded and the crew of the *Space Wanderer II* went into action. The hands of the Martians were fatal traps, reaching out and squeezing two heads at a time with monotonous rhythm; cracking skulls and dropping lifeless bodies in their wake.

The Neptunian catmen were in their element: claws bared, teeth bloody, they plowed a red furrow through the mob, and around them was the continuous death shriek of Tandorians who felt the bite of those lashing stinging tails.

The birdmen fluttered aloft, covering the attack with practiced eyes, diving down with short swords flashing, to slash the heads off any Tandorian who seriously threatened a member of the *Wanderer's* crew.

The Tandorians close by screamed in horror at the carnage and the savageness of the attack. Those who could, beat a frenzied retreat, some with arms hanging by shreds of flesh, some with fatal slashes, bites and stings filling them with the agony of approaching death.

But the main body of the Tandorian mob was aware of the turn of events and pressed in, thus furnishing a continual supply of victims for the *Wanderer's* deadly crew.

Wolf Halloran and Lars Anson—teeth agleam, eyes alight with the lust for battle—drove ever forward, side by side. There was a fixed grin on Lars' face. He reached over and

dragged a Tandorian off Wolf's shoulders. He hooked an arm under the man's chin, raised a knee for leverage, and broke the unfortunate's spine. The man screamed; Wolf turned and Lars Anson gave forth with a loud guffaw.

"It's all right, bossman. Just stick with old Lars! He'll bring you through."

There was a grim smile under Wolf's snarling reply. "Kill your own, you lazy Swede. Quit taking mine away from me."

And the murderous wedge moved on through the crowd, leaving the dead and the dying in its wake.

"Up this street!" Wolf yelled. "They've probably taken Pat back to the palace. We've got to get there before Ramed removes her from the city! We've got to make the roof of the palace and catch the air car!"

"Sure thing, bossman. Just follow me."

But Wolf shouldered Lars aside. "You're too slow! I'll lead the way."

As though his words were a signal, the Tandorian mob became aware of the true situation. In a flash, their lust for battle deserted them. They turned and fled, breaking in all directions, and Lars Anson yelled, "Look! Look up there!"

BUT WOLF was too busy at the moment and did not turn his eyes skyward until the first bomb fell on the city, sending up a great geyser of brick, mortar, and orange flames. Then Wolf and every inhabitant of New Rome looked up to see the heavens darkening, filled suddenly with the snub-nosed cruisers of an inner-planetary battle fleet.

"They've come!" Lars yelled. "By the Great Gan! They've come at last to blow this accursed planet out of its orbit and back into cosmic dust!"

"And us with it if we don't find

that air car!" Wolf turned to rally his men, to shout orders which always before they had obeyed. But this time they didn't obey. This time they were too full of the lust for vengeance, too eager to wipe out the stigma of that cowardly performance in the arena. Now they had reverted completely to the wild beasts they really were.

The Martians and the Neptunians and the Mercurians and all the rest were scattering in all directions after the fleeing Tandorians. With deadly precision, they overtook their squalling victims, killed swiftly and moved on to kill again.

"It's hopeless, bossman!" Lars called out. "They're beyond control! You can never round them up. Let's go!"

His face tight with emotion, Wolf Halloran took a last look at his dauntless crew, then turned and ran with Lars up the street.

A bomb fell close by and both men went face down on the pavement. There was the mighty roar of toppling buildings and then the two were up again, running. They gained the broad steps of Ramed's palace and went swiftly in under the portico as the street behind them erupted in a geyser of flame.

Now Tandorians were fleeing the palace, seeking to get clear before a bomb brought the whole structure toppling down on them.

Wolf and Lars pushed through the terrorized crowds and forged on inside until they were alone in the great lower hall. They took the grand stairway four steps at a time, gained the throne room and had just caught first sight of the spectacle which presented itself when a bomb ripped away the entire front section of the building.

They went down again, tensing their muscles, gritting their teeth against the repercussion. Then, even

before the currents had quieted, they were again on their feet.

But sheer amazement held them rooted for a moment. There in the center of falling masonry and leaping flames was a sight they would remember for many years to come.

RAMED, his eyes filled with madness, was seated on his throne. Like Nero of old, he sat there, a great, gross, cruel figure with a violin across his knees. He was sawing a bow across the strings of the instrument, bringing forth weird, discordant sounds which were in perfect keeping with the crackling flames, the far-off screams of the dying, and the continual thunder of bombs falling on the city.

But that was not all. Kneeling at his feet, her wrist held to the throne by silver chains, was Pat.

"Great Gan!" Lars muttered. "He's mad! Stark raving mad!"

"The hell with that. We've got to get to the roof before the rear half collapses. The air car is back there."

As Wolf leaped forward, Ramed came to his feet and held forth the violin bow like a scepter. "Hold! Hold, Earthling! Lay hands on my Empress and you die! It is Nero who speaks! Sit you down on the floor like loyal subjects and listen while Nero plays!"

Wolf paid no attention to the maniac. He seized those silver chains in his great hands and jerked them. They gave with a tinkling sound and he lifted Pat into his arms.

"Put her down, you fool! Put her down I say! Nero must fiddle while Rome burns! Who are you to circumvent history?"

"Fiddle ahead," Lars barked. "Who cares? Let's get out of here, Wolf."

Ramed's face turned livid. "Hold, I say! No one uses the air car! I have given orders! I drove them all

away from it. This is ancient Rome and there are no air cars! Can't you understand that? There are no air cars!"

They ran toward the roof, his screams and imprecations fading out behind them. "We've got to get there before the roof caves in," Lars panted.

"There it is! If the beams hold for another sixty seconds, we'll be all right."

"Sure, unless we get knocked out of the sky by a falling bomb. They're thicker than flies!"

The car responded instantly to its controls and lifted the three Earthlings up into the sky over New Rome. But there was a final moment of drama that held them in spite of falling death and all the heavens reddened by explosions. As they hung for a moment in space, they could look down upon a dying city. In all directions the flames leaped, higher and higher, the black smoke billowed and chaos unlimited prevailed.

But for just a single moment, the smoke rolled away from the palace and they could look down into the vast throne-room open now to the flaming sky. Down there they saw a great glittering throne, as yet untouched.

Seated languidly on that throne, drawing a bow across the strings of a violin, sat the madman Ramed; the madman who had almost conquered the inner planets and now sat fiddling in the inferno of his shattered dream.

Then the rear half of the magnificent building toppled slowly forward. With majestic dignity it fell in one piece, crashing down on the throne and upon Ramed who occupied that throne. There was a sound like distant thunder as the structure went to pieces. Then a great cloud of dust signifying the end of an empire.

Wolf shook his head fiercely to

break the spell of the thing. "Let's get out of here," he snapped. "Hit those controls."

Lars bent to his work and the air car shot skyward. Up through the falling bombs. Up and up until the space fleet was below them.

Lars turned to grin at Wolf. "How's that, bossman? I told you just stick with old Lars and he'd pull you through."

"More luck than brains," Wolf retorted. "Now see if you can contact the fleet commander and tell him who we are."

"Sure thing. I'm hungrier than hell. It's about time this spaceman had a square meal." And he flipped the switch of the visi-plate before him.

THERE WERE subdued lights and soft music on the roof garden in Chicago. Wolf Halloran, Patricia Halloran, and Lars Anson, sat at a small table fingering wine glasses. Lars was in a somber mood. He looked up from his wine and said, "What now, bossman?"

Pat's hand was laid possessively over that of Wolf. She said, "He's

through with the old life, Lars. No more space freighting. He's a land-lubber from now on."

Lars sighed, "I was afraid of that."

"But you're not a land-lubber, Lars," Wolf Halloran said. "You're just the man to get another good crew together and ride the space-lanes again."

"That's what I intend to do. I'm no good on Earth."

"No, you aren't," Pat said dreamily. "You belong up among the stars, Lars Anson."

Lars got to his feet. "Well, then this is goodbye—old friends. Goodbye, for a while at least. You see there's something I didn't tell you. I've already got a ship and a crew, and we hit the high dark void in an hour. Be seeing you."

Lars walked away and there was silence at the small table. Then, with one accord, Wolf and Pat looked into each other's eyes. With one motion they came to their feet. As one, they were running across the room. And Wolf Halloran's voice boomed out:

"Hey, you damn stupid Swede—wait for us!"

THE END

AERIAL BLOW-HARD!

By LEO PATTERSON

RESearchers and meteorologists in South America have discovered the presence of a big wind to end all big winds. At altitudes about thirty-thousand feet, there are winds of enormous velocities blowing equatorially around the Earth! These winds, apparently caused the meeting of hot and cold air masses, travel with velocities up to two hundred miles an hour. Such jet-propelled winds have been noted elsewhere in both America and Asia.

Off-hand you might think of them as menaces to aerogation, but on the contrary, they may prove extremely useful. Aerologists are thinking of them exactly as oceanographers think of swift ocean currents. Why not hitch a ride on them?

And that's exactly what we may expect in the future. Commercial and military aircraft are seeking higher and higher

altitudes. Soon many commercial craft will be pressurized jets capable of rising to very high altitudes. It will be a comparatively simple matter for them to slide into one of the equatorial air flows and thus save fuel and time in spinning around the Earth.

The streams are as wide as two hundred miles so locating in them isn't too difficult. Naturally a great deal of charting and plotting must be done before they can be utilized, but that they will be is a certainty.

Trans-oceanic rockets also will be able to make good use of such air-streams, especially since fuel and pay-load are so carefully balanced. The air-stream will allow a generous margin of safety in a relatively dangerous procedure. The time is coming when Man will really "ride the wind!"

STOMACH SPOTTER

By
OMAR BOOTH

AS IS GENERALLY known, certain cancerous tissues slough off dead cancer cells. If these cells can be examined and identified, it is frequently possible to make a cancer diagnosis. Since cancer is presently one of our worst killers it is important to be able to do this.

In particular cancer of the stomach is a noted difficult form of the disease to detect. A recent invention has aided in the detection of this hidden killer and made it possible for surgeons to locate a stomach cancer with some degree of certainty.

The device used is called a "brush-balloon" and consists of essentially, a small rubber balloon about four inches in diameter which can be inflated by air-pressure and whose surface is covered with small soft nylon bristles. When the gadget is inserted in the stomach through the mouth, expanded with air through a rubber tube and brushed around the stomach, it is capable of picking up the sloughed-off dead cancerous cells. When removed these cells can be examined microscopically and the presence or absence of cancer determined.

As yet, this is still in the experimental stages and may give way to other and more subtle methods. Most promising of all in the long run, though not to be used for some time, are electronic devices which are capable of doing the job. The new science of "medico-electronics" appears to offer tremendous advantages. We have al-

ready reported on the use of electronically controlled anaesthetizers, and the workings of electroencephalographs for measuring brain wave-activity. It is evident that we are just on the verge of what may prove to be a revolution in medicine.

Since life has been discovered to be hardly more than an electrochemical phenomenon, and since science has done so much in chemistry and electronics, it seems only logical that a union of these two arts, as related to the human body, will produce some amazing advances soon.

The point is that medicine up until recent years has been primarily a mechanical affair linked a bit with chemistry. But life is more subtle than that. What is more natural than that we should seek the roots and sources of science and scientific probing. Electronics and chemistry are these sources. Coupling advances made in them to the study of human ills will probably be the answer to finally conquering disease. It is certain that if Man doesn't obliterate himself from the planet completely, he is certain to effectively conquer disease. Every sign-post points the way. One by one we've been knocking out the major disease until now only a few remain. Not all men are fortunate enough to be beneficiaries of the newer techniques, but someday they will. And the sooner medicine, chemistry and electronics become one, the better!

THE THINKING IDIOT

By
CLYDE MOORE

BERKELEY, mathematician, statistician and expert on electro-mechanical computing machines has written numerous papers and a book on mechanical brains. He has worked on some of the largest and most complex computing machines in the world. But apparently the love of his life is a little experimental, elementary robot, which he humorously refers to as the "little idiot" because it is so simple and because it can perform only a very limited series of operations.

This small model of a calculating machine employing complex circuitry and relays is capable of doing very limited calculations. Physically he is no bigger than a suitcase and his practical value is low. What then was the purpose in constructing what Berkeley calls the "little moron"? The answer of course is obvious. It is an educational device designed to teach students of calculating machines the basic principle on which they work. For there is essentially no difference between "Simon" and the big calculators. They operate in identical ways. They differ only in com-

plexity.

But for a beginner to try and understand the functioning of a full blown brain is impossible. Simple Simon however has circuits and relays whose individual functions are perfectly clear. It is no trick at all to follow from beginning to end a sequence of operations.

Then, since the bigger machines are made up of multiples of devices like Simon, by extension the student can grasp how the large ones work without getting tangled up in the minute details. Like all brains of a mechanical variety, the individual cells are relays which are capable (like the neurons in a human brain) of giving two simple actions—"on" and "off".

With hundreds and hundreds of computing machines going into every phase of human activity from warfare to business, electro-mechanical brains are going to require large numbers of technicians. They'll start with the idiots of the family—brains like Simple Simon—and work up to the geniuses—like the Harvard computer!



She tried to blot out of her mind and heart the fact that this "man" was not human!



Satisfaction Guaranteed

By Isaac Asimov

**For a woman to fall in love, the man should
be young, handsome, rich, kind—and a human!**

TONY WAS tall and darkly handsome, with an incredibly patrician air drawn into every line of his unchangeable expression, and Claire Belmont regarded him through the crack in the door with

a mixture of horror and dismay.

"I can't, Larry. I just can't have him in the house." Feverishly, she was searching her paralyzed mind for a stronger way of putting it; some way that would make sense and settle

things, but she could only end with a simple repetition.

"Well, I can't!"

Larry Belmont regarded his wife stiffly, and there was that spark of impatience in his eyes that Claire hated to see, since she felt her own incompetence mirrored in it. "We're committed, Claire," he said, "and I can't have you backing out now. The company is sending me to Washington on this basis, and it probably means a promotion. It's perfectly safe and you know it. What's your objection?"

She frowned helplessly, "It just gives me the chills. I couldn't bear him."

"He's as human as you or I, almost. So, no nonsense. Come, get out there."

His hand was on the small of her back, shoving; and she found herself in her own living room, shivering. *It* was there, looking at her with a precise politeness, as though appraising his hostess-to-be of the next three weeks. Dr. Susan Calvin was there, too, sitting stiffly in thin-lipped abstraction. She had the cold, faraway look of someone who has worked with machines so long that a little of the steel had entered the blood.

"Hello," crackled Claire in general, and ineffectual, greeting.

But Larry was busily saving this situation with a spurious gayety. "Here, Claire, I want you to meet Tony, a swell guy. This is my wife, Claire, Tony, old boy." Larry's hand draped itself amiably over Tony's shoulder, but Tony remained unresponsive and expressionless under the pressure.

He said, "How do you do, Mrs. Belmont."

And Claire jumped at Tony's voice. It was deep and mellow, smooth as the hair on his head or the skin on his face.

Before she could stop herself, she

said, "Oh, my,—you talk."

"Why not? Did you expect that I didn't?"

BUT CLAIRE could only smile weakly. She didn't really know what she had expected. She looked away, then let him slide gently into the corner of her eye. His hair was smooth and black, like polished plastic,—or was it really composed of separate hairs? And was the even, olive skin of his hands and face continued on past the obscurity of his formally-cut clothing.

She was lost in the shuddering wonder of it and had to force her thoughts back into place to meet Dr. Calvin's flat, unemotional voice.

"Mrs. Belmont, I hope you appreciate the importance of this experiment. Your husband tells me he has given you some of the background. I would like to give you more, as the senior psychologist of the U. S. Robots and Mechanical Men Corporation.

"Tony is a robot. His actual designation on the company files is TN-3, but he will answer to Tony. He is not a mechanical monster, nor simply a calculating machine of the types that were developed during World War II, fifty years ago. He has an artificial brain nearly as complicated as our own. It is an immense telephone switchboard on an atomic scale, so that billions of possible 'telephone connections' can be compressed into an instrument that will fit inside a skull.

"Such brains are manufactured for each model of robot specifically. Each contains a precalculated set of connections so that each robot knows the English language to start with, and enough of anything else that may be necessary to perform his job.

"Until now, U. S. Robots had confined its manufacturing activity to industrial models for use in places where

human labor is impractical—in deep mines, for instance, or in under-water work. But we want to invade the city and the home. To do so, we must get the ordinary man and woman to accept these robots without fear. You understand that there is nothing to fear.”

“There isn’t, Claire,” interposed Larry, earnestly. “Take my word for it. It’s impossible for him to do any harm. You know I wouldn’t leave him with you otherwise.”

Claire cast a quick, secret glance at Tony and lowered her voice, “What if I make him angry?”

“You needn’t whisper,” said Dr. Calvin, calmly. “He *can’t* get angry at you, my dear. I told you that the switchboard connections of his brain were predetermined. Well, the most important connection of all is what we call ‘The First Law of Robotics’, and it is merely this: ‘No robot can harm a human being, or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.’ All robots are built so. No robot can be forced in any way to do harm to any human. So, you see, we need you and Tony as a preliminary experiment for our own guidance, while your husband is in Washington to arrange for government-supervised legal tests.”

“You mean all this isn’t legal?”

Larry cleared his throat, “Not just yet, but it’s all right. He won’t leave the house, and you mustn’t let anyone see him. That’s all. —And Claire, I’d stay with you, but I know too much about the robots. We must have a completely inexperienced tester so that we can have severe conditions. It’s necessary.”

“Oh, well,” muttered Claire. Then, as a thought struck her, “But what does he do?”

“Housework,” said Dr. Calvin, shortly.

She got up to leave, and it was Larry who saw her to the front door. Claire stayed behind drearily. She caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror above the mantelpiece, and looked away hastily. She was very tired of her small, mousy face and her dim, unimaginative hair. Then she caught Tony’s eyes upon her and almost smiled before she remembered—

He was only a machine.

LARRY BELMONT was on his way to the airport when he caught a glimpse of Gladys Claffern. She was the type of woman who seemed made to be seen in glimpses. —Perfectly and precisely manufactured; dressed with thoughtful hand and eye; too gleaming to be stared at.

The little smile that preceded her and the faint scent that trailed her were a pair of beckoning fingers. Larry felt his stride break; he touched his hat, then hurried on.

As always, he felt that vague anger. If Claire could only push her way into the Claffern clique, it would help so much. But what was the use?

Claire! The few times she had come face to face with Gladys, the little fool had been tongue-tied. He had no illusions. The testing of Tony was his big chance, and it was in Claire’s hands. How much safer it would be in the hands of someone like Gladys Claffern.

CLAIRE WOKE the second morning to the sound of a subdued knock on the bedroom door. Her mind clamored, then went icy. She had avoided Tony the first day, smiling thinly when she met him and brushing past with a wordless sound of apology.

“Is that you,—Tony?”

“Yes, Mrs. Belmont. May I enter?”
She must have said, yes, because he

was in the room, quite suddenly and noiselessly. Her eyes and nose were simultaneously aware of the tray he was carrying.

"Breakfast?" she said.

"If you please."

She wouldn't have dared to refuse, so she pushed herself slowly into a sitting position and received it: poached eggs, buttered toast, coffee.

"I have brought the sugar and cream separately," said Tony. "I expect to learn your preference with time, in this and in other things."

She waited.

Tony, standing there straight and pliant as a metal rule, asked, after a moment, "Would you prefer to eat in privacy?"

"Yes. —I mean, if you don't mind."

"Will you need help later in dressing?"

"Oh my, no!" She clutched frantically at the sheet, so that the coffee hovered at the edge of catastrophe. She remained so, in rigor, then sank helplessly back against the pillow when the door closed him out of her sight again.

She got through breakfast somehow. —He was only a machine, and if it were only more visible that he were, it wouldn't be so frightening. Or if his expression would change. It just stayed there, *nailed* on. You couldn't tell what went on behind those dark eyes and that smooth, olive skin-stuff. The coffee-cup beat a faint castanet for a moment as she set it back, empty, on the tray.

Then she realized that she had forgotten to add the sugar and cream after all, and she did so hate black coffee.

SHE BURNT a straight path from bedroom to kitchen after dressing. It was her house, after all, and there wasn't anything frippy about her, but she liked her kitchen clean.

He should have waited for supervision—

But when she entered, she found a kitchen that might have been minted fire-new from the factory the moment before.

She stopped, stared, turned on her heel and nearly ran into Tony. She yelped.

"May I help?" he asked.

"Tony," and she scraped the anger off the edges of her mind's panic, "you must make some noise when you walk. I can't have you stalking me, you know. —Didn't you use this kitchen?"

"I did, Mrs. Belmont."

"It doesn't look it."

"I cleaned up afterwards. Isn't that customary?"

Claire opened her eyes wide. After all, what could one say to that? She opened the oven compartment that held the pots, took a quick, unseeing look at the metallic glitter inside, then said with a tremor, "Very good. Quite satisfactory."

If, at the moment, he had beamed; if he had smiled; if he had quirked the corner of his mouth the slightest bit, she felt that she could have warmed to him. But he remained an English lord in repose, as he said, "Thank you, Mrs. Belmont. Would you come into the living room?"

She did, and it struck her at once. "Have you been polishing the furniture?"

"Is it satisfactory, Mrs. Belmont?"

"But when? You didn't do it yesterday."

"Last night, of course."

"You burnt the lights all night?"

"Oh, no. That wouldn't have been necessary. I've a built-in ultra-violet source. I can see in ultra-violet. And, of course, I don't require sleep."

He did require admiration, though. She realized that, then. He had to know that he was pleasing her. But

she couldn't bring herself to supply that pleasure for him.

She could only say, sourly, "Your kind will put ordinary house-workers out of business."

"There is work of much greater importance they can be put to in the world, once they are freed of drudgery. After all, Mrs. Belmont, things like myself can be manufactured. But nothing yet can imitate the creativity and versatility of a human brain, like yours."

And though his face gave no hint, his voice was warmly surcharged with awe and admiration, so that Claire flushed and muttered, "My brain! You can have it."

Tony approached a little and said, "You must be unhappy to say such a thing. Is there anything I can do?"

FOR A moment, Claire felt like laughing. It was a ridiculous situation. Here was an animated carpet-sweeper, dish-washer, furniture-polisher, general factotum, rising from the factory table—and offering his services as consoler and confidant.

Yet she said suddenly, in a burst of woe and voice, "Mr. Belmont doesn't think I have a brain, if you must know. —And I suppose I haven't." She couldn't cry in front of him. She felt, for some reason, that she had the honor of the human race to support against this mere creation.

"It's lately," she added. "It was all right when he was a student; when he was just starting. But I can't be a big man's wife; and he's getting to be a big man. He wants me to be a hostess and an entry into social life for him— Like G—guh—guh— Gladys Claffern."

Her nose was red, and she looked away.

But Tony wasn't watching her. His eyes wandered about the room, "I

can help you run the house."

"But it's no good," she said, fiercely. "It needs a touch I can't give it. I can only make it comfortable; I can't ever make it the kind they take pictures of for the Home Beautiful magazines."

"Do you want that kind?"

"Does it do any good—wanting?"

Tony's eyes were on her, full. "I could help."

"Do you know anything about interior decoration?"

"Is it something a good housekeeper should know?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then I have the potentialities of learning it. Can you get me books on the subject?"

Something started then.

CLAIRE, clutching her hat against the brawling liberties of the wind, had manipulated two fat volumes on the home arts back from the public library. She watched Tony as he opened one of them and flipped the pages. It was the first time she had watched his fingers flicker at anything like fine work.

I don't see how they do it, she thought, and on a sudden impulse reached for his hand and pulled it toward herself. Tony did not resist, but let it lie limp for inspection.

She said, "It's remarkable. Even your finger nails look natural."

"That's deliberate, of course," said Tony. Then, chattily, "The skin is a flexible plastic, and the skeletal framework is a light metal alloy. Does that amuse you?"

"Oh, no," she lifted her reddened face. "I just feel a little embarrassed at sort-of poking into your insides. It's none of my business. You don't ask me about mine."

"My brain-paths don't include that type of curiosity. I can only act within my limitations, you know."

And Claire felt something tighten inside her in the silence that followed. Why did she keep forgetting he was a machine? Now the thing itself had to remind her. Was she so starved for sympathy that she would even accept a robot as equal,—because he sympathized?

She noticed Tony was still flipping the pages,—almost helplessly,—and there was a quick, shooting sense of relieved superiority within her, "You can't read, can you?"

Tony looked up at her; his voice calm, unapproachful, "I *am* reading, Mrs. Belmont."

"But—" She pointed at the book in a meaningless gesture.

"I am scanning the pages, if that's what you mean. My sense of reading is photographic."

It was evening then, and when Claire eventually went to bed, Tony was well into the second volume, sitting there in the dark, or what seemed dark to Claire's limited eyes.

Her last thought, the one that clamored at her just as her mind let go and tumbled, was a queer one. She remembered his hand again; the touch of it. It had been warm and soft, like a human being's.

How clever of the factory, she thought, and softly ebbed to sleep.

IT WAS THE library continuously, thereafter, for several days. Tony suggested the fields of study, which branched out quickly. There were books on color-matching and on cosmetics; on carpentry and on fashions; on art and on the history of costumes.

He turned the pages of each book before his solemn eyes, and, as quickly as he turned, he read; nor did he seem capable of forgetting.

Before the end of the week, he had insisted on cutting her hair, introducing her to a new method of arranging it, adjusting her eyebrow line

a bit, and changing the shade of her powder and lipstick.

She had palpitated in nervous dread for half an hour under the delicate touch of his inhuman fingers and then looked in the mirror.

"There is more that can be done," said Tony, "especially in clothes. How do you find it for a beginning?"

And she hadn't answered; not for quite a while. Not until she had absorbed the identity of the stranger in the glass and cooled the wonder at the beauty of it all. Then she had said, chokingly, never once taking her eyes away from the warming image, "Yes, Tony, quite good,—for a beginning."

She said nothing of this in her letters to Larry. Let him see it all at once. And something in her realized that it wasn't only the surprise she would enjoy. It was going to be a kind of revenge.

TONY SAID one morning, "It's time to start buying, and I'm not allowed to leave the house. If I write out exactly what we must have, can I trust you to get it? We need drapery, and furniture fabric, wallpaper, carpeting, paint, clothing,—and any number of small things."

"You can't get these things to your own specifications at a stroke's notice," said Claire, doubtfully.

"You can get fairly close, if you go through the city, and if money is no object."

"But, Tony, money is certainly an object."

"Not at all. Stop off at U. S. Robots in the first place. I'll write a note for you. You see Dr. Calvin, and tell her that I said it was part of the experiment."

DR. CALVIN, somehow, didn't frighten her as on that first

evening. With her new face and a new hat, she couldn't be quite the old Claire. The psychologist listened carefully, asked a few questions, nodded—and then Claire found herself walking out, armed with an unlimited charge account against the assets of U.S. Robots and Mechanical Men Corporation.

It is wonderful what money will do. With a store's contents at her feet, a sales lady's dictum was not necessarily a voice from above; the uplifted eyebrow of a decorator was not anything like Jove's thunder.

And once, when an Exalted Plumpness at one of the most lordly of the garment salons had insistently poohed her description of the wardrobe she must have with counter-pronouncements in accents of the purest 57th Street-French, she called up Tony, then held the phone out to Monsieur.

"If you don't mind,"—voice firm, but fingers twisting a bit, "I'd like you to talk to my—uh—secretary."

Pudgy proceeded to the phone with a solemn arm crooked behind his back. He lifted the phone in two fingers and said delicately, "Yes." A short pause, another, "Yes", then a much longer pause, a squeaky beginning of an objection that perished quickly, another pause, a very meek, "Yes," and the phone was restored to its cradle.

"If Madam will come with me," he said, hurt and distant, "I will try to supply her needs."

"Just a second." Claire rushed back to the phone, and dialed again, "—Hello, Tony. I don't know what you said, but it worked. Thanks. You're a—" She struggled for the appropriate word, gave up, and ended in a final little squeak, "—a—a dear!"

It was Gladys Claflern looking at her when she turned from the phone

again. A slightly amused and slightly amazed Gladys Claflern, looking at her out of a face tilted a bit to one side.

"Mrs. Belmont?"

It all drained out of Claire—just like that. She could only nod;—stupidly, like a marionette.

Gladys smiled with an insolence you couldn't put your finger on, "I didn't know you shopped here?"—as if the place had, in her eyes, definitely lost caste through the fact.

"I don't, usually," said Claire, humbly.

"And haven't you done something to your hair? It's quite—quaint. —Oh, I hope you'll excuse me, but isn't your husband's name, Lawrence? It seems to me that it's Lawrence."

Claire's teeth clenched, but she had to explain. She *had* to. "Tony is a friend of my husband's. He's helping me select some things."

"I understand. And quite a *dear* about it, I imagine." She passed on smiling, carrying the light and the warmth of the world with her.

CLAIRE DID not question the fact that it was to Tony that she turned for consolation. Ten days had cured her of reluctance. And she could weep before him: weep and rage.

"I was a complete f—fool," she stormed, wrenching at her water-logged handkerchief. "She does that to me. I don't know why. She just does. I should have—kicked her. I should have knocked her down and stamped on her."

"Can you hate a human being so much?" asked Tony, in puzzled softness. "That part of a human mind is closed to me."

"Oh, it isn't she," she moaned. "It's myself, I suppose. She's everything I want to be—on the outside, anyway. —And I can't be."

Tony's voice was forceful and low in her ear, "You can be, Mrs. Belmont. You *can* be. We have ten days yet, and in ten days the house will no longer be itself. Haven't we been planning that?"

"And how will that help me—with her?"

"Invite her here. Invite her friends. Have it the evening before I—before I leave. It will be a house-warming, in a way."

"She won't come."

"Yes, she will. She'll come to laugh. And she won't be able to."

"Do you really think so? Oh, Tony, do you think we can do it?" She had both his hands in hers. And then, with her face flung aside, "But what good would it be? It won't be I; it will be you that's doing it. I can't ride your back."

"Nobody lives in splendid single-ness," whispered Tony. "They've put that knowledge in me. What you, or anyone, see in Gladys Claflern is not just Gladys Claflern. She rides the backs of all that money and social position can bring. She doesn't question that. Why should you?—And look at it this way, Mrs. Belmont. I am manufactured to obey, but the extent of my obedience is for myself to determine. I can follow orders niggardly or liberally. For you, it is liberal, because you are what I have been manufactured to see human beings as. You are kind, friendly, unassuming. Mrs. Claflern, as you describe her, is not, and I wouldn't obey her as I would you. So it is you, and not I, Mrs. Belmont, that is doing all this."

He withdrew his hands from hers then, and Claire looked at that expressionless face no one could read,—wondering. She was suddenly frightened again in a completely new way.

She swallowed nervously and stared at her hands, which were still tingling

with the pressure of his fingers. She hadn't imagined it; his fingers had pressed hers, gently, tenderly, just before they moved away.

No!

Its fingers— Its fingers—

She ran to the bathroom and scrubbed her hands, blindly, uselessly.

SHE WAS a bit shy of him the next day; watching him narrowly; waiting to see what might follow. For a while, nothing did.

Tony was working. If there was any difficulty in technique in putting up wall paper, or utilizing the quick-drying paint, Tony's actions did not show it. His hands moved precisely; his fingers were deft and sure.

He worked all night. She never heard him, but each morning was a new adventure. She couldn't count the number of things that had been done, and by evening she was still finding new touches—and another night had come.

She tried to help only once and her human clumsiness marred that. *He* was in the next room, and she was hanging a picture in the spot marked by Tony's mathematical eyes. The little mark was there; the picture was there; and a revulsion against idleness was there.

But she was nervous, or the ladder was rickety. It didn't matter. She felt it going, and she cried out. It tumbled without her, for Tony, with far more than flesh-and-blood quickness had been under her.

His calm, dark eyes said nothing at all, and his warm voice said only words, "Are you hurt, Mrs. Belmont?"

She noticed for an instant, that her falling hand must have mussed that sleek hair of his, because for the first time, she could see for herself that it was composed of distinct strands, —fine black hairs.

And then, all at once, she was conscious of his arms about her shoulders and under her knees,—holding her tightly and warmly.

She pushed, and her scream was loud in her own ears. She spent the rest of the day in her room, and thereafter she slept with a chair up-ended against the doorknob of her bedroom door.

SHE HAD sent out the invitations, and, as Tony had said, they were accepted. She had only to wait for the last evening.

It came, too, after the rest of them, in its proper place. The house was scarcely her own. She went through it one last time—and every room had been changed. She, herself, was in clothes she would never have dared wear before. And when you put them on, you put on pride and confidence with them.

She tried a polite look of contemptuous amusement before the mirror, and the mirror sneered back at her masterfully.

What would Larry say? It didn't matter, somehow. The exciting days weren't coming with him. They were leaving with Tony. Now wasn't that strange? She tried to recapture her mood of three weeks before and failed completely.

THE CLOCK shrieked eight at her in as many breathless installments, and she turned to Tony. "They'll be here soon, Tony. You'd better get into the basement. We can't let them—"

She stared a moment, then said weakly, "Tony?" and more strongly, "Tony?", and nearly a scream, "Tony!"

But his arms were around her now; his face was close to hers; the pressure of his embrace was relentless.

She heard his voice through a haze of emotional jumble.

"Claire," the voice said, "there are many things I am not made to understand, and this must be one of them. I am leaving tomorrow, and I don't want to. I find that there is more in me than just a desire to please you. Isn't it strange?"

His face was closer; his lips were warm, but with no breath behind them—for machines do not breathe. They were almost on hers.

And the bell sounded.

For a moment, she struggled breathlessly, and then he was gone and nowhere in sight, and the bell was sounding again. Its intermittent shrillness was insistent.

The curtains on the front windows had been pulled open. They had been closed fifteen minutes earlier. She *knew* that.

They must have seen then. They must *all* have seen,—everything!

THEY CAME in so politely, all in a bunch—the pack come to howl—with their sharp, darting eyes piercing everywhere. They *had* seen. Why else would Gladys ask in her jabbingest manner after Larry? And Claire was spurred to a desperate and reckless defiance.

Yes, he *is* away. He'll be back tomorrow, I suppose. No, I haven't been lonely here myself. Not a bit. I've had an exciting time. And she laughed at them. Why not? What could they do? Larry would know the truth, if it ever came to him, the story of what they thought they saw.

But *they* didn't laugh.

She could read that in the fury in Gladys Claflern's eyes; in the false sparkle of her words; in her desire to leave early. And as she parted with them, she caught one last, anonymous whisper—disjointed.

"—never saw anything like— *—so handsome—*"

And she knew what it was that had enabled her to finger-snap them so. Let each cat mew; and let each cat know—that she might be prettier than Claire Belmont, and grander, and richer—but not one, *not one*, could have as handsome a lover!

And then she remembered again—again—again, that Tony was a machine, and her skin crawled.

"Go away! Leave me be!" she cried to the empty room and ran to her bed. She wept wakefully all that night and the next morning, almost before dawn, when the streets were empty, a car drew up to the house and took Tony away.

LAURENCE BELMONT passed Dr. Calvin's office, and, on impulse, knocked. He found her with mathematician Peter Bogert, but did not hesitate on that account.

He said, "Claire tells me that U. S. Robots paid for all that was done at my house—"

"Yes," said Dr. Calvin. "We've written it off, as a valuable and necessary part of the experiment. With your new position as Associate Engineer, you'll be able to keep it up, I think."

"That's not what I'm worried about. With Washington agreeing to the tests, we'll be able to get a TN model of our own by next year, I think." He turned hesitantly, as though to go, and as hesitantly turned back again.

"Well, Mr. Belmont?" asked Dr. Calvin, after a pause.

"I wonder—" began Larry, "I wonder what really happened there. She—Claire, I mean,—seems so different. It's not just her looks—though, frankly, I'm amazed." He laughed nervously, "It's *her*! She's not my wife, really—I can't explain it."

"Why try? Are you disappointed with any part of the change?"

"On the contrary. But it's a little

frightening, too, you see—"

"I wouldn't worry, Mr. Belmont. Your wife has handled herself very well. Frankly, I never expected to have the experiment yield such a thorough and complete test. We know exactly what corrections must be made in the TN model, and the credit belongs entirely to Mrs. Belmont. If you want me to be very honest, I think your wife deserves your promotion more than you do."

Larry flinched visibly at that, "As long as it's in the family," he murmured unconvincingly and left.

SUSAN CALVIN looked after him, "I think that hurt—I hope.—Have you read Tony's report, Peter?"

"Thoroughly," said Bogert, "And won't the TN-3 model need changes!"

"Oh, you think so, too?" questioned Calvin, sharply. "What's your reasoning?"

Bogert frowned, "I don't need any. It's obvious on the face of it, that we can't have a robot loose which makes love to his mistress, if you don't mind the pun."

"Love! Peter, you sicken me. You really don't understand? That machine had to obey the First Law. He couldn't allow harm to come to a human being, and harm was coming to Claire Belmont through her own sense of inadequacy. So he made love to her, since what woman would fail to appreciate the compliment of being able to stir passion in a machine—in a cold, soul-less machine. And he opened the curtains that night deliberately, that the others might see, and envy—without any risk possible to Claire's marriage. I think it was clever of Tony—"

"Do you? What's the difference whether it was pretence or not, Susan? It still has its horrifying effect. Read the report again. She avoided

him. She screamed when he held her. She didn't sleep that last night—in hysterics. We can't have that."

"Peter, you're blind. You're as blind as I was. The TN model will be rebuilt entirely, but not for your reason. Quite otherwise; quite other-

wise. Strange that I overlooked it in the first place," her eyes were opaquely thoughtful, "but perhaps it reflects a shortcoming in myself. You see, Peter, machines can't fall in love, but—even when it's hopeless and horrifying—women can!"

IT'S NO JOKE, COMRADE!

By SALEM LANE

THAT SOVIET scientists, engineers, and technicians are first-rate must be admitted. We can't delude ourselves otherwise. We must face facts. A study of Russian technical journals shows that they're strictly on the ball, doing first-rate work.

But as in all dictatorships, scientists labor under the handicap of a merciless and interfering bureaucracy which can, in time, throttle and slow down, if not destroy, the scientific approach and attitude. This was evident in Nazi Germany and is evident in Soviet Russia today.

It's not easy to be a scientist in a dictatorship with some commissar or other supervisor breathing down the back of your neck and peering into your laboratory to see that you're not hiding some bourgeois ideals. It's not easy at all.

The famous story illustrating the difficulty with which scientists labor in the Soviet Juggernaut, clearly pictures the humorless seriousness with which the Marxians take themselves and which promises ill for the future—fortunately. The story goes back to the Thirties. Frenkel, a famous Russian physicist was lecturing before a group of students and he repeated the current gag among physicists that "on Monday, Wednesdays, and Fridays, the electron is a particle; on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays it is a wave." This crack was common enough. But a young

student got up and said firmly, "that bourgeois compromise cannot exist alongside Marxian dialectical materialism!"

Frenkel took the hint. He left Russia shortly. Nowadays, as a reading of Soviet scientific society notes shows, gagging or joking in any form is not appreciated.

You can well imagine how, in such an atmosphere, genuine scientific detachment and disinterest are prevented from existing, and without those attitudes, truly objective work can't be done. When politics sticks its dirty fingers into scientific activity, the activity ceases to be scientific.

A great portion of the strength of our own scientific establishment lies in the fact that our researchers are not accountable for what they think or theorize. Results count, not lip-service to political nonsense. But the same isn't true in the Soviet dictatorship. That the Soviet scientists are able to do as well as they can is a tribute to their scientific ability, not to their political system. And eventually—since politics of that sort always corrupt—we shall see a decline in the Russian output. Already it is manifesting itself. Soviet biology is becoming a joke. They haven't yet really gotten into the physicists but that will undoubtedly come too.

Should war come, the Soviets will be mighty sorry they restricted and interfered with the sane, scientific men among them—and we'll be glad that they did!

FLEA-POWER GIANT

By W. R. CHASE

LOOKING like a surrealistic dream of the twenty-second century, are thirty-four monolithic concrete towers spaced about twenty-five miles apart and ranging in height from sixty to two-hundred, linking Chicago to New York in a television relay system. Atop the grim towers, like huge peering eyes are the radio lenses which focus the high frequency carrier waves between the stations into nice tight beams only a few degrees wide, almost with the tightness of a flashlight beam!

These towers are miracles of modern technology. Not only do they carry the television programs but they do so as huge impersonal, unattended robots. They are filled with automatic machinery with al-

most everything in duplicate including the power producing equipment, so that the danger of interruption is almost nil. Elaborate warning apparatus coupled with periodic inspection makes break-down, even temporary—highly unlikely.

But what is more remarkable is to realize that these huge structures house radio generating equipment whose actual output is merely *one-half* of a watt! This incredibly small amount of power is capable of transferring itself over the intervening twenty-five miles or so between the towers primarily because the lenses make it into such a narrow beam that practically none of the energy is lost!



"I regard this," Percy was saying, "as a golden opportunity to study an alien race"

LET'S GIVE AWAY MARS!

By Clee Garson

**Don't worry about the men from Mars.
We've already conquered them—and with
something far worse than the atom bomb!**

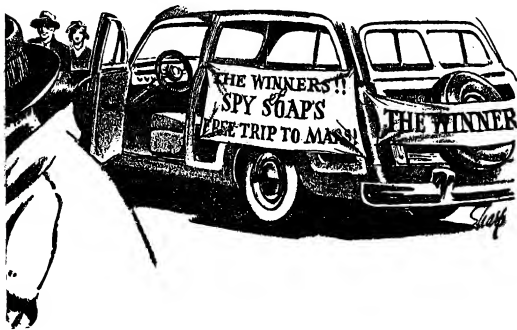
ABOUT TWO months after I'd become the end name on the firm of Beaton, Batten, Burton & O'Leary, advertising counselors, we landed the Spy Soap account.

At first, we thought we had the world by the tail and the strength to swing it. Fifteen percent—the customary agency fee—of the Spy advertising appropriation each year

alone was enough to keep even larger agencies knee-deep in paneled offices and shapely secretaries.

And then we personally met Jeremiah Spy, the Soap King, who believed in his product with all the frenzied zeal of a missionary selling Heaven and buckram-bound Bibles....

He sat behind his battered roll-top desk, a thin cadaverous man with a



habitual expression of morose dignity on his face. There were no pleasant preliminaries as we came into the dingy cubbyhole he used as his office, no highballs in crystal glasses, no dollar cigars handed around.

"Gentlemen," he snarled, "I'm interested in selling soap. Other men may be interested in sex or food or shooting eighteen holes of golf in the low seventies. But I have no such distractions in my life. I want people to buy my soap—and it's up to you to plan a campaign that will sell it. Let me hear how you're going to do it."

We had three suggestions to make then and there. He rejected every one of them.

Back in our own office, the four of us had a conference. We tossed ideas around fruitlessly for the better part of an hour. And then this thing hit me in one dazzling flash of pure genius!

"I got it!" I bellowed. "The perfect gimmick!"

"Glory to God!" Johnny Beaton cried. "I knew we could count on you, Mike!"

Oscar Burton, the practical member of the firm, looked at me doubtfully. "Tell us about it, Mr. O'Leary."

"A give-away show," I said—and cut off their groans by raising both hands. "Listen: I know give-away shows are old stuff now. But why? It's because the sponsors ran out of ideas on *what* to give away."

"And you got something new to give away?" Burton asked skeptically.

"Right! I suggest a show which, as the main prizes, will give the lucky winners an all-expense trip to Mars!"

The silence that followed was deep and unflattering. The three partners looked at one another, then pointedly raised their eyes toward the ceiling.

"What's wrong with you?" I yelled.

"Don't you get it? Of course we won't send people to the *planet* Mars, you literal-minded asses. We'll find a little town somewhere in, say, Colorado, or Wyoming, to go along with our gag and change its name to Mars. But first we'll whip up bales of publicity and get everybody guessing on what we're going to do."

The plan was shaping up beautifully even while I was talking. "For the payoff," I went on, "we'll have a phony space ship set up at Mitchell Field and load in the winners with a grand flourish. Then we'll fire off a bunch of rockets, lay down a smoke screen, take the winners *off* the space ship, put them on a plane and fly them to Mars, Wyoming, where they'll be the guests of Spy Soap for two thrill-packed weeks!"

By this time it was beginning to get across to the others.

"Hey, I like it!" Johnny cried. "The columns will love a gag like that."

"Let's see Spy," Oscar said.

Jeremiah Spy heard our idea with his usual expression of bitter displeasure. But when I finished, he said, "I won't go so far as to say I like it but it's worth trying. Get on with it."

THEN THERE was the business of getting a dummy space ship. I knew what I wanted, of course. Something like the standard-brand of science-fiction ship, with shining hull, flaring fins and so forth.

I remembered a professor I'd known in college who was hipped on interplanetary communication. His name was Hinesmuller, and his accent was so thick that I don't believe anyone had fully understood him since he left his native Austria thirty years before.

I looked him up and made a date to see him that same night. The rest

of the day I spent with officials at Mitchell Field. They weren't too happy about the project at first, until someone suggested they could charge admission to people who wanted to inspect the space ship. After that the atmosphere became good-humored and cooperative.

At seven-thirty that night, I knocked on the professor's door, which was at the top of three rickety flights of stairs in a neighborhood crawling with brats, vegetable carts and sidewalk artists.

The door opened and there the professor was, hardly changed at all in the six years since I'd last seen him. "Come in, come in," he said heartily, and led me into a cluttered study and sitting room. He brought out a bottle of schnapps, offered me pipe tobacco and then beamed down at me like a jolly, Christmas card figure. His hair was totally white now, but as abundant as ever; his eyes, behind thick bifocals, still merry and youthful.

"Vass iss oop?" he said, cocking his head.

"What?"

"Vass iss oop?" he repeated, chuckling. He slapped my knee triumphantly. "Iss slang!"

"Oh." I got it then. *Vass iss oop?* equalled "what's up?" after undergoing the scrambling action of the professor's dialect.

"Just this," I said, speaking very distinctly. "I want you to build me a space ship. Do you understand?"

He chuckled. "Yah!"

"Can you do it?"

"Yah!"

"Now here's the point: this ship will be a dummy. Do you understand? Dummy."

He looked injured. "Vy you call names, eh?"

"No, *you're* not a dummy. But the space ship is. Now how much money

will you need?"

That got him excited. "You got money? Money for space ship?"

"Yes. How much will you need?"

"I 'ave been already vorking on space ship. But I must 'ave five t'ousand more dollars."

We settled that detail, and I told him where the ship was to be constructed. Then I said goodbye. Down in the street I paused, vaguely troubled. I had the feeling that the professor hadn't quite got the pitch. He seemed to think he was a building a *real* space ship.

I laughed then, because that idea was so ridiculous, and walked on to my car. . . .

AFTER THAT we whipped the show into shape, and the publicity built up with the force of a tidal wave. Everyone began talking about the all-expense trip to Mars!

Reactions were mixed and violent. Crowds flocked out to Mitchell Field to look at the ship. Senators talked about it in Washington, and one waggish solon made the point that Mars would want a loan from the United States if we ever did reach there. Spy Soap got the benefit of the discussion.

Meanwhile I found a one-horse town in Oklahoma that was willing to go along with the gag. They agreed to change the name of their hamlet from Broken Elbow to Mars the night our show went on the air.

I took a trip out to the field one afternoon to check on the professor. There was a crowd watching the construction of the ship, standing outside the roped-off enclosure and talking knowingly of ergs, gravity fields and the Heaviside Layer, whatever the hell they were. It all proved how easily people can be fooled in this strange and wondrous land of ours. I showed my special pass to the guard

and walked in to find the professor. He was with a couple of earnest young men checking some figures on a chart. They were talking about booster rockets.

I glanced at the ship while the professor rambled on in a jargon made up of equal parts of algebra, physics, and Ellis Island English. He had done beautifully so far, I decided. The hull of the ship was about eighty feet long, a tube of slender shining grace. Curving fins flared dramatically from the tapered nose, and at the rear were graceful blisters which presumably housed the "rockets". It looked mighty realistic resting there in the scaffolding.

The professor came over to me, beaming. "Ve go in a veek. Whoosh!" He puffed his cheeks and emitted air in an explosive blast. "Like dot!"

"Fine," I said. . .

On the way back to the office, I again had the disquieting feeling that the professor and I were seeing somewhat less than eye-to-eye on this deal. But reason reasserted itself and I smiled. I glanced up at the towering, prosaic buildings above me, and at the reassuring, dull people surging along the sidewalks. Space ships! The idea was really funny. . .

THE SHOW, as *Variety* put it, was a boff! Went on at eight o'clock with twenty-five million people hanging onto every word, and the entire nation waiting for its phone to ring.

There were three first-prize winners. They were interviewed by the wire services the next morning and told how they felt about going to Mars. It was wonderful.

They arrived at our office the next morning where I met them formally. There was Miss Murdock, a plump graying spinster with a speculative gleam in her eyes; Master Percy Wilkins, an unlikable lad of about

fourteen, with horn-rimmed glasses, an Eton collar, and an air of lordly superiority; and Valerie Jones, a slim and pretty red-head.

"Well, well, the lucky winners," I said.

Master Percy regarded me suspiciously. "The adjective 'lucky' is not at all apt."

Miss Murdock simpered. "Do you know anything about the male population of Mars?" she inquired archly.

Valerie Jones said nothing, which was probably just as well. I was already of the opinion that Master Percy was a prize little stinker, and that Miss Murdock was going to be a ghastly bore. I preferred to keep my present good opinion of Valerie, and that would probably be easier if she kept quiet.

However, after escorting them around town that day I wasn't so sure of myself. Valerie said very little; but there was an alertness about her that made me suspicious. She was no dumb little gal going along for the ride. Finally, while Miss Murdock was ogling a waiter and Percy was chattering in a nauseatingly manly fashion with the bartender, I got in a few words with Valerie.

"You seem bored," I said. "Did we miss your favorite spot?"

"No."

"This your first trip to New York?"

"Yes."

"Excited?"

"Clinically, yes."

I squinted at her. "What does that mean?"

She turned to me gravely. "I'm writing a thesis for my masters degree in Sociology. This trip is giving me a fine opportunity to study the neurotic fringes of our society."

"Who are they?" I said blankly.

"You, for one," she said. "You and the rest of your breed in radio, public relations, and so forth. This stunt

of yours, for instance. Can you imagine a sane normal person dreaming up a thing like that?"

"You don't like it, eh?" I said, nettled.

"Oh, it will sell soap, I suppose, but in essence it's phony and deplorable."

"Oh, is that so!" I said, which was hardly a stopper.

"Yes, that's so," she said, picking up her gloves. "I'm going back to my room to make some notes. You'll excuse me, I'm sure."

I got up and watched her leave, thinking that it was a pity that such an alluring specimen should have to be inflicted with an intellect. She had a slender, erect figure, and slim handsome legs, and I watched it all until it disappeared through the doorway. Then I sat down and met Miss Murdock's leering gaze. It was quite a shock.

"We're all alone," she said, tittering.

"We'll have to fix that," I said hastily, and waved for the check.

THE NEXT day the prize winners were interviewed on a few radio spots; and Master Percy, by some chicanery, got himself on the Arthur Godfrey show. Then the night for the take-off arrived, and shortly before we left for the field I told the prize winners where we were actually going, so they could notify their families. None of them seemed disappointed.

We drew up to Mitchell Field in a limousine, preceded by a motorcycle escort of police. The newsreels and papers were there waiting for us, along with thousands of curious spectators. A spot-light shone on the space ship. A band played dance music. And Spy Soap banners floated everywhere.

We trudged up the ramp to a door in the hull of the ship and a great roar from the crowd went with us. The professor greeted us warmly, if inco-

herently, and pulled us inside. He closed the door and twisted a wheel that locked it very tightly. We were led to foam-rubber seats, equipped with head-straps that held our noggins firmly against the backs of the seats.

The professor smiled at all of us then and trotted up the aisle to a forward compartment. A moment later a gentle throbbing made the ship tremble.

The professor appeared and waved to us. "All right, ve go now! Whoosh!" He expelled air between his lips. "Like dot!"

He ducked out of sight again and the noise increased. The palms of my hands were suddenly damp. I had a horrible feeling that all was not right.

"Professor!" I yelled.

The noise grew a hundred-fold, a report sounded like the crack of a mighty rifle, and I was pinned flat against the seat under tremendous pressure. There was a hissing, splitting sound, like a cyclone blowing across a beach, then a feeling of pulsing, driving motion.

The professor appeared again, smiling with drunken ecstasy.

"It vorks, it vorks!" he cried.

I knew then, in that portion of the mind that harbors all ghastly knowledge, that we were heading for Mars—and *not* Mars, Oklahoma!

CHAPTER II

"IT WAS supposed to be a gag!" I yelled for the umpteenth time.

Percy, Miss Murdock and Valerie regarded me with varying expressions of distrust. We had been skimming through space for about ten hours now and tempers were far from jolly.

"I intend to sue," Percy said with exasperating relish. He squared his puny shoulders. "I shan't be able to

matriculate with my class because of this so-called gag of yours."

"Well, that's a break for your class," I said sourly.

Miss Murdock poked me in the chest with a bony forefinger. "We thought we were going to Mars, Oklahoma!"

"So did I, for God's sake," I yelled.

The professor came down the aisle beaming good-naturedly, and Percy and Miss Murdock began gabbing their complaints at him in high shrill voices. When they paused for breath, he said: "Don't mention it. Was glad to do it for you."

"When do we get to Mars?" I asked. The question had a nightmarish sound. I had waited hopefully to wake up; but nothing happened. We continued to speed through the void.

"Soon—maybe eight, ten hours."

"That proves you're crazy," Percy sneered, in his attractive fashion.

"Zo?" The professor peered down at Percy with something less than affection. "Come wit' me, pliz."

He herded us to the rear of the ship where there was an observation platform facing a clear glass window. Through the window there was nothing but blackness.

The professor reached for a lever. "Now vatch!" He depressed the lever, and instantly a streak of light flashed across the window and disappeared.

"It went out!" Percy said.

"No, ze light is still burning. Und ve left it behind us." The professor laughed merrily. "Ve go like hell, eh?" He puffed out his cheeks but I beat him to it this time.

"Whoosh!" I said. "Like dot, eh?"

He looked dejected. "Yah. We go much faster dan light. Dot's vy ve can't see Ert' and the stars behind us. Dere beams can't catch oop mit us."

His good-humor restored, the professor smiled and hurried back to the control room.

Valerie had sat down, crossed her pretty legs, and was making notes.

"You're taking all this pretty calmly," I said.

"I try not to get involved with life," she said. "It's more interesting to study it from a distance, I've found."

"Some day life is going to step up and kick you right in the teeth," I told her, with very little grace. Her aloofness affected me in a curious way. I admired her for it; yet I wanted to see her composure shattered if only for a moment.

"I doubt it," she said, and went on with her notes; and I had the uneasy feeling that she was recording our immediate conversation....

EIGHT HOURS went by. Then the professor gave us vitamin pills, and nose clips attached to oxygen cylinders, and a little later we landed on the planet Mars with the ease of a gull settling on water. The door was unlocked and opened and we piled outside eagerly.

Obviously the professor hadn't chosen the garden spot of the planet. The area was rocky, dismal, uninspiring; and a gray murky fog added to the impression of dank gloom.

But the professor was ecstatic. "Ve haf made it!" he cried.

"Okay, let's get started back," I said, and waved to the forbidding horizon. "Hail and farewell, old red planet. I'll be back when you get interior plumbing."

"Hardly seems right to rush right off," Miss Murdock said. "Maybe there are men—I mean people—here."

"I don't like it," Percy announced flatly; and Mars rose suddenly in my estimation.

"You probably never had it so good," I told him.

"I didn't live on a rock heap," he snapped.

"You probably lived under one."

Valerie glanced at me coolly. "What needs do you satisfy by shouting at this child?"

"He's no child," I fumed. "He's an animated section of gangrene."

Our discussion, if that's the word for it, was cut short by a shrill cry from Miss Murdock. She was pointing off to the horizon, her face looking like a vivacious prune.

"Oh, look!" she cried.

Eight or ten round flat objects were skimming toward us through the fog, not twenty feet above the ground. They circled the ship, then settled around us in a tight circle.

Creatures began climbing from the saucer-like conveyances.

"Hey, Mars is inhabited," I yelled, in a flash of deductive genius.

"Oh, I knew dot," the professor said.

The creatures were bandy-legged, plump, and about four feet high. They were salmon-colored, with round hairless heads, and features—while hardly handsome by my standards—that seemed amiable and good-humored. All of them were dressed alike in short skirts and jackets made of some metallic cloth.

They hurried toward us from their little planes, and from their rapidly opening and closing mouths came noises that sounded pretty much like intense static from a crystal set. Stopping about five yards from us, and making sounds like a giant bowl of Wheaties, they bowed from the waist.

One of them stepped forward and bowed until his forehead grazed the ground.

"Crackle, snap, pop!" he seemed to be saying. Then he said something that brought the hairs up on my neck. It was a single word.

"God!"

out in a powerful, revival-tent voice: "Glory to be Him! They're Christians!"

The professor cocked his head as the Martian continued chattering; and gradually the light of understanding broke over his face. He began talking then, slowly, haltingly, and *he* sounded just like a bowl of cereal. When he finished, all the Martians began clattering along like runaway typewriters, interspersing their remarks with repetitions of that awesome word, *God*.

Obviously, the professor could communicate with them, and that didn't surprise me as much as it might have. Hell, he couldn't talk English, so it figured he knew *some* language. It might as well be Martian.

He turned to us, then, and said, "Zey vish us to come and see God."

"God?" I said.

"Zey worship God," he said simply.

"Well, that's one thing in common," I said. "Maybe they've got some gin players here, too."

Valerie frowned at my levity. Percy patted her arm and said, "Consider the source, my dear."

Miss Murdock was taking things in stride. She winked at the Martian who had acted as spokesman for the group. The Martian stared at her and let out a stream of crackling sounds, and Miss Murdock blushed, and said, "Naughty! Naughty little man."

I wondered how she knew.

Two of the other Martians began chattering at the professor; he turned to us when they finished. "Zey vant us to come mit dem now." He frowned. "Zey also vant to know vich of us is zick, and vich is going blind, and who is—how you say—cheating on best friend."

"I don't get it," I said blankly.

"Iss strange," the professor said, which struck me as putting it mildly.

VALERIE GASPED and Miss Murdock sank to her knees and cried

Anyway, we climbed into the flat round ships—they were like large saucers—and soon were soaring into the air. I sat next to Miss Murdock, who was trembling with maidenly excitement at the proximity of so many creatures who had a fifty-fifty chance of turning out to be males.

"Remember that milkman," I told her sternly.

"Oh, Mr. O'Leary, you are the one," she said, giggling.

Within half an hour we approached a city that was laid out with about the same skill as a village of blocks built by a seriously retarded child. Minarets, cones and spires popped up unexpectedly, some unconnected with anything, others extending parallel to the ground and serving no purpose I could see but to block traffic. They were of various colors, but deep blues and reds predominated, and in the weak sunlight that filtered through the fog, the city glowed resplendently.

We unloaded in a cleared area between two high red buildings. I quickly got to the professor's side. He seemed to know what was going on. And that was more than could be said for anybody else, including the Martians.

WE WERE herded amiably along a passageway leading between two buildings. More Martians had joined us now and the chattering noise they made was about what you'd expect at a cricket convention.

The passageway ended before high double doors. I nudged the professor. "What's going on?"

"Iss strange. Our radio—"

"Radio? What's radio got to do with it?"

He sighed and shrugged. "I dun' know."

This enlightening conversation was ended as the great door swung open.

We surged into a large hall, with green walls and seats arranged in tiers. The wall at the far end of the hall was blank and on it a white light danced and flickered.

Soon the hall was crowded and the doors swung shut again, cutting off the light. We sat in darkness staring at the flickering light on the far wall. . . .

The pattern of light began to flicker and change, reshaping itself into various herringbone designs.

Then the Martians began chanting in unison, and soon the walls were throbbing with their metallic voices. They paused briefly, and in a great burst of sound, cried: "God!"

They did this three times.

Frankly I had goose-pimples all over by then.

Suddenly a musical fanfare sounded. Then a tremendous voice boomed through the hall. The words were indistinct, but I heard one that sounded like "strike."

The illuminated section of the wall came to life.

Flashing lights raced across its surface and a giant head appeared. The head smiled good-humored greeting at us, and a hand waved casually.

I felt my mind tug at its moorings.

"God!" cried the Martians in a hysteria of piety.

I clutched onto my seat and decided not to think about anything—not *anything*!

And for the next half hour we watched an amiable, red-haired man go through his act against an illuminated wall in a Martian temple.

An amiable, red-haired man named Arthur Godfrey!

CHAPTER III

"HISS their God, dot's all!"

The professor said this as if it were no more difficult to grasp

than the multiplication tables.

We were alone in a spacious but sparsely furnished room to which we'd been taken after the Godfrey show. Valerie, Miss Murdock, and Percy were across the hall from us in a similar set-up.

I was trying with total lack of success to remain calm.

"So Godfrey's their God, eh?" My voice broke in the middle of the sentence and finished on a squealing high C. "Just like that!" I punched the professor in the chest with my finger. "These are Martians, remember? How does Godfrey's show *get* here? Is there a Martian network that nobody ever told me about?"

"Iss strange," he said. "Zey hear our radio somehow. And our television."

I had a moment of sympathy for the Martians. "A tough break for them," I said. "So that's how they know about us. Through radio."

"Dot's right. Remember, zey ask us which of us iss zick, and which is going blind, and—"

"They're soap opera addicts," I said.

"Zoap opera?"

The professor could speak Martian, could build space ships, could unravel scientific mysteries without wrinkling his forehead, but his ignorance on some matters was literally cosmic.

I started to explain, but the door opened and I was saved the trouble. Valerie, Miss Murdock and Percy entered, and with them was the little Martian who had met our space ship. His name was something like Krikki-Krik and he greeted the professor warmly. They began chattering to each other like club members meeting unexpectedly in some distant corner of the earth.

I was surprised at how glad I was to see Valerie; but her reaction was

hardly similar. She was still icily reserved.

"Why don't you relax a bit?" I asked. "After all, we don't seem to be in any danger, and the chances of getting back to Earth are reasonably good."

"I'm not frightened," she said. "I'm bored."

"Goodness me, I'm not," Miss Murdock said, wriggling her shoulders. "This place is just *crawling* with men!"

"They're not men; they're Martians," Percy said in his usual nasty manner.

"Dear me, 'what's in a name?' as Shakespeare said," Miss Murdock squealed, and her laugh skittered up the scale suggestively.

Valerie sat down and took out her note book. Uninvited, I sat beside her and studied her clean and classic profile.

"So you're bored, eh?"

"That's right. The novelty value of this absurd trip has worn pretty thin."

"Spoken like a typical sociologist," I said, and I was genuinely angry. "You think you can find out about life in the library stacks, or by reading the agate footnotes of some other cloistered cutie who also never got out and found out what people really thought and cared about. Here you're on the planet Mars, one of the first human beings ever to travel through space, to visit another culture, to fulfill a dream that man has had ever since he first looked at the stars. And you act as if you're stuck in Philadelphia for a summer weekend."

"I didn't ask you to analyze me," she said.

"I'm doing it anyway," I told her grimly. "I think you're afraid of life. That attitude of cool scorn you affect is a transparent defense. You don't know anything about life, but you're

secretly afraid you couldn't handle it. problems. So you hide from it between the covers of books."

There were spots of angry color in her cheeks. "That's not fair," she said hotly. "You've got no right to call me names, and to—" She stopped abruptly and got to her feet, and I saw that her lips were trembling.

This battle was interrupted by the professor. He came over and touched my arm. "Krikki-Krik wants us to go to hall again."

"Why? What's up?"

"I haf' idea, but iss hard to explain."

"Well, try it nice and slow."

"Ve—all of us—are going on give-away show." He studied me anxiously. "Iss dot right?"

"It's your story," I said; but my voice was a bit unsteady.

"Vell, dot's dot."

"Wait. What are we going to *do* on this show?"

"Zat is puzzle me. Ve are going to be, how you say, ze—"

"Yes, go on!"

The professor beamed. "I haf' it. Ve are going to be ze prizes."

THE GREAT hall was once again packed with Martians, but now they were in the mood of a crowd at a Sunday double-header. We faced them from a platform with lights beating into our faces.

My mind was churning—to put it mildly.

Valerie was beside me and for the first time she looked uncertain.

"Do—do you know what's going on?" she asked.

"Yes. We're going to be given away. We're the main prizes on a Martian give-away show."

"Oh, but that's idiotic! I don't want to be given away."

"There seems to be no alternative for you."

She looked at me in panic. "Are you going to let them?"

I crossed my arms and assumed a lofty expression. "I prefer to view reality from a safe distance. I am a calm spectator on the shores of life's river. Let the stream break and roil! What care I? I'm also a Taoist, you'll notice."

She turned away angrily. "You're mocking me. You're throwing my own words back at me."

"Well you thought they were pretty cute words, remember?"

Krikki-Krik raised his arms then and silence settled over the hall. He led the professor forward and there was a low, seemingly good-natured buzzing from the audience. Percy was led forward and was met with total silence. I was next and got a moderately lively greeting. If volume meant approval, I was leading Percy by a comfortable margin. I glanced at him and sneered.

Miss Murdock got quite a hand. The irritating buzzings and chattering shot up to a mild roar, but when Valerie came forward the roof fell in. The crowd got to its feet and chattered like a thousand erratic radios. Obviously, they knew a good dish when they saw it.

Valerie shot me an appealing glance.

I shook my hands over my head. "Congratulations, champ," I called out.

"Very funny," she said coldly.

We were taken back to our chambers then and the professor attempted to question Krikki-Krik about what had happened; but it was either too simple or too complicated because he finally gave up with a bewildered shrug.

"Iss crazy!" he said, wagging his head.

Finally the door opened and two Martians strode in. They were larger

than Krikki-Krik and looked assured and capable. I had the impression they were the sort who would know how elections were going to turn out and what was in the bag at Hialeah—on Earth, that is.

One of them, a dish-faced smiler, made a bee-line for Miss Murdock. The other, smiling even more widely, headed for Valerie.

Krikki-Krik said something and the professor put both hands to his head and rocked it gently.

"Ze winners," he said in a hollow voice.

"Well, I swan," Miss Murdock said, patting her Martian on the head. "I always knew I'd get me *some* kind of man."

"Oh!" Valerie wailed and covered her face with her hands.

Krikki-Krik sputtered something and the professor looked to the two women and smiled weakly.

"Zey are very wealthy Martians. Zey own big farms. Krikki-Krik says you are both lucky."

"A big farm?" Miss Murdock said contentedly. "Well, isn't that nice?"

"Zey will take you wit them tomorrow," the professor said. "Iss all set."

The two lucky Martians took a last delighted glance at their prizes, then marched out, pictures of happiness.

Valerie stamped her foot. There were tears in her eyes. "I won't go off to some Martian farm."

"Now, child," Miss Murdock said. "It's not as bad as all that."

Krikki-Krik said, "God!" suddenly and chattered at the professor.

"Ve mus' go vorship again," the professor said petulantly.

I remembered then that Godfrey is on the air just about as regularly as the system cue, and the prospect of worshipping him eighteen hours a day was rather bleak.

BUT THERE was no alternative.

We went back to the great hall where thousands of Martians were waiting in a frenzy for their Supreme Being. Godfrey came on after the commercial, and I sat up straighter and nudged my neighbor who turned out to be a Praying Martian. He regarded me with wounded eyes and returned to his meditations—and I nudged the other way and caught Valerie in the ribs. It was a nice place to catch her.

"Ouch!" she said.

"Watch!" I whispered in her ear.

It was a pointless injunction since there was nothing else to do but watch; but she sat up straighter too.

Then, next to Godfrey's homey, good-humored face, appeared the thin and petulant features of Master Percy. This was the show he'd made while we were in New York, and now, after getting through the Heaviside layer and across space, it was being re-telecast here on Mars.

There was an astonish crackle from the Martians.

"Hey, that's me!" Percy cried out, with the instinct of a true ham.

The show went on, and except for Percy's brief appearance, it was as pleasant as always. But afterward, when the wall went dark and the great doors were opened, there was a rustle of confusion among the Martians.

They milled about us, crackling excitedly, and those nearest Percy, began bowing and bumping their foreheads on the ground.

Percy stood up, practically purring with contentment at all the attention he was getting. He stared about in surprise for a moment. Then, as more and more of the Martians began prostrating themselves before him, he got the pitch.

"They're adoring me," he cried happily. "They think I'm a God!"

"God!" I muttered.

The Martians stepped up the volume of their vocal homage until the hall was humming, and I saw with some alarm a rather pleased but stern expression flitting across young Percy's face.

CHAPTER IV

BACK IN our chambers I found myself alone with Valerie. Percy was outside in the corridor being worshipped by a group of radio-happy Martians, while the professor and Krikki-Krik were communing in another room. I hadn't the faintest idea where Miss Murdock was, and I couldn't have cared less.

Valerie paced the floor, wringing her hands. She looked very desolate. I was touched.

I went to her and caught hold of her shoulders.

"Look," I said. "I'm not going to let any Martian yokel carry you off to be a milk-maid."

"N-no?" she said hesitantly.

"Certainly not! I'm going to take you back to Earth. And I'm going to teach you more about life than you'll learn in two dozen libraries."

"Y-you are?"

"Yes!"

I kissed her then, thoroughly, effectively. For a moment her body stiffened and her hands pushed against my shoulders; then her arms went slowly about my neck.

Later—much later—we came up for air.

"Lesson number one," I said.

"I'm beginning to understand," she said dreamily. "Perhaps with a few more lessons—"

I began lesson number two.

The door opened during this beautiful teacher-pupil relationship and Percy entered. He let out a shrill shocked yelp.

"I have never seen anything so disgusting," he cried. "You must be out of your mind, Miss Jones."

Valerie moved away from me reluctantly. She glanced at Percy, and sighed. "It isn't every girl who has a chance to spank a Martian God."

"You'll probably never get a better opportunity," I said.

"Now just a minute," Percy cried, backing cautiously toward the door.

Valerie moved very swiftly and with great determination. She caught Master Percy by the scruff of his pants as he bolted for the door, and in a split-second he was over her knee and she was spanking him with tremendous enthusiasm.

I listened with pleasure to his outraged squawks.

When Valerie released him, much too soon, I felt, he dashed to the door and shook a fist at us.

"I'm a God, and you can't do this to me! I'll fix you!"

With that he ran out...

The professor and Krikki-Krik came in. I had my arm about Valerie's waist and was getting ideas—and not quite the ones you'd expect. I had a way to get us back to Earth, and to release Miss Murdock and Valerie from their commitments to the farmers.

"Professor," I said. "Tell Krikki-Krik this: that give-away shows depend on the prize. And that I've got a prize that will electrify and startle everybody on Mars. Go ahead, tell him!"

With a bewildered shrug, the professor repeated my message to Krikki-Krik, who reacted to it with definite interest.

"Okay," I said. "Give him the rest of it with all your eloquence, Prof. The main prize will be a *free trip to Earth.*"

As the professor repeated my words, I felt that the circle had been

completed. Starting with a free trip to Mars we were back, inevitably, to a free trip to Earth.

Krikki-Krik just about blew his top with satisfaction at the news. But before he could get away, I yelled: "One more thing, Prof. Tell him the first give-away has to be cancelled. Tell him that the girls are essential to the operation of the space ship."

"Oh!" Valerie cried happily.

The professor did as I told him and Krikki-Krik made no objections. He seemed eager to get started on the new show, and hurried out grinning....

EVERYTHING went smoothly. The show was a great success, winners were determined, and the professor got started readying the ship for the return trip to Earth.

There was only one hitch. Miss Murdock vanished along with her farmer-winner. I presume she figured a Martian in the hand was worth two milkmen in the bush. At any rate the time for the take-off found her missing at roll call.

"It's probably just as well," Valerie said. "She'll be happy here."

"She'd be happy anywhere with a man," I said.

Then as we were assembled and ready to leave for the ship a king-sized monkey wrench came hurtling into the gears. The door opened and Percy swaggered in, followed by dozens of stern Martians who carried nasty-looking spears.

Percy opened his mouth and cracked out something in Martian, and his spear-carriers ringed us in, the points of their weapons glittering under our noses.

"The plans have been changed," Percy said calmly. "I'm God around here, and I changed them. The professor can go back to Earth, but Valerie is going to stay with me.

Eventually I'll need—er—a Goddess."

"Great jumping catfish!" I yelled. "And she turned down a Martian."

"You, O'Leary," Percy said sternly, "are going to stay here too. And be my body servant."

The professor took a big silver watch from his pocket with a curiously deliberate gesture. He held it by the chain and let it revolve slowly. Light bounced and glittered on its polished surfaces.

"Percy," he said in a gentle voice. "Vatch ze vatch."

"Huh?" Percy glanced at the watch, and his eyes moved back and forth with its motion. "I don't see what—" His voice trailed off slowly.

"Dot's better," the professor said, smiling. "You're tired, eh, Percy?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I seem to be," Percy said in a hushed voice.

"You must rest. Take your royal guard wit' you and go to ze bedroom. Sleep like a God."

"Yes, I must do that," Percy murmured. He said something in Martian to his followers and then, moving like a sleepwalker, he turned and walked from the room. His guards followed him, crackling bewilderedly among themselves.

"Let's go!" Professor Hinesmuller said, with a sly grin....

WE WAVED farewell to Mars with happy hearts. I stood with my arm about Valerie as the Professor locked us into the ship and led the two Martian prize-winners to their seats.

"I feel happy about Miss Murdock," Valerie said softly.

"So do I."

"But I feel sorry for poor Percy."

"Where Percy's concerned," I said, "I feel sorry for the poor Martians."

THE END

the STAR GRABBERS

By H. B. Hickey



"You'll do!" Ykim, the Mertian, purred. "We need workers—and you'll furnish them!"

**For the first time in six hundred years,
Earthmen struck back at their Martian conquerors.
But the habit of slavery can be deep-rooted . . .**

THE FIRST blow was struck on a bright May afternoon in the year 2557 in a district known as *Blurij*, not far distant from the valley of the *Tenasee*.

It was a *taken*. Older women and children wailed in the streets of the village. The men stood herded like cattle with their heads bowed, waiting to be led away. And now the dragoons from the two silver ships in the meadow were making their rounds, taking their choice of the girls and younger women.

A pea-green, barrel-bodied Martian emerged from a house, his round, red

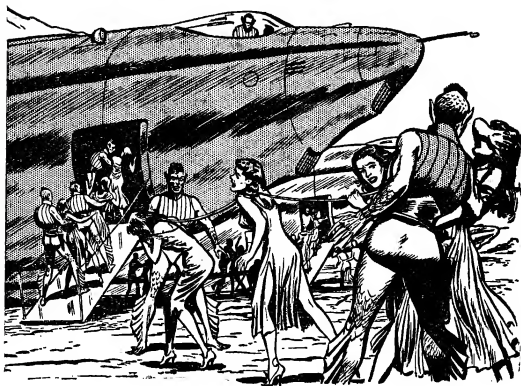
eyes gleaming as he dragged a girl behind him.

"Ykim," he gurred. "Look! A prize for the pleasure houses!"

He held her for Ykim to see. She was tall, well formed. A rip with his hand and her charms were exposed, her single garment falling around her feet. Long green fingers writhed about her.

"And this one," Ykim said, showing the woman he held. "A breeder. She'll produce workers aplenty."

He flung the woman to the other dragoon and stalked into the next house on the street. The houses were



shacks, and this one seemed to be empty.

But Ykim knew better. These Earthwomen would sometimes try to hide. Probably thought it increased their value. Foolish of them, of course. Pleasure types brought certain prices, breeders others, workers a much lower price. None of them brought too much; they were used up so quickly.

He peered behind a cloth screen that divided two beds. Nothing there. He looked under the beds. Nothing there either. Only one more possibility, a closet. He opened it.

She was a beauty, tall, raven haired, her breasts swelling the bodice of her thin garment. Ykim paused to consider the price she might bring. Like one plucking a delicate fruit, he reached out for her.

She darted under his arm. He whirled, barely missed her shoulder. The screen got between them and she tipped it backward as she ran. Ykim flung it aside and found she had almost gained the back door.

He went after her, six feet of fighting man with trained reflexes. By the time she got her feet on the ground, he was right behind her. His hand flicked out and fell on her shoulder. But she twisted away again.

There was a man standing in the back yard, leaning against a tree. Taller than Ykim, and wider in the shoulders, with tawny hair and tawny, easy eyes. An Earthman.

"Seize her!" Ykim barked.

The Earthman stirred, but seemed to have trouble getting started. It turned out Ykim didn't need any help. A spin, a twist, and he had the girl.

Once caught, resistance went out of her. She stood submissively with her eyes downcast while Ykim took a handful of her hair in his clutch. But when he began to fondle her with his free hand, she shuddered.

"Don't do that," the Earthman said.

Ykim stared. An Earthman! This one looked to be a farmer type, probably from the terraces of Blurij. Something must be wrong with him. Perhaps it was a mistake; perhaps he hadn't really spoken.

"Don't do that," the Earthman said again, and this time Ykim knew he had heard right.

One hand still clutching the girl, he freed the other hand and calmly reached for his holster. But he was too calm, too slow.

With a leap like a cat at a bird, the Earthman was on him. A fist came up in an arc that terminated at the point of Ykim's jaw. The jaw tilted upward sharply, too sharply. There was a crack and Ykim lay flat on the ground.

There was a suspended moment, when time stood still. The girl stared at the prostrate Martian in wide-eyed disbelief. The Earthman, too, was unbelieving. He looked down, stared at his still closed fist.

"You struck him," the girl said. Her voice was awed.

FOR MORE than six hundred years, not a hand had been lifted against a man of Mars, not a voice had been raised. Not since the night the silvery ships first appeared in the sky of Earth.

A single blast, a single moment, and the capitals of Earth were no more. Then the ships landed. Earth breezes wafted strange gases; strange rays lanced Earth's night. Portholes opened and the men of Mars emerged.

So had begun the subjugation of a planet.

With cold calculation, with brutal efficiency, the job was done. Overnight, the factories of Earth worked for Mars, making new products, strange devices. Overnight, the fertile fields of Earth were tilled for Mars.

Overnight, the culture of a planet

was gone, an alien culture imposed. Schooling existed, but only for necessary technologists. In two generations, the names of immortals were erased from Earth's memory. History was gone; only legend remained.

Takens were accepted as a matter of course, the word itself coined from the deed. Ships would suddenly appear, and families were torn asunder as the dragoons took those they chose. No one taken ever returned. Just as well, rumor said.

And from the first day to this, there had not been a finger lifted in resistance, not a voice raised....

“WHERE ARE you taking me?” the girl asked.

For an hour they had been traveling fast and she was out of breath. The town and the meadow lay behind and below them, for they were well up a rugged hillside.

“Some place where they won’t find us,” the man replied. “Tired?”

“Yes.”

He swung her lightly to his shoulder and moved upward, her weight seeming not to slow him at all. For an hour he continued to carry her, and then she asked to be put down.

They paused for a while in a small hollow and she looked at him again, seeing the height and breadth of him. His tawny eyes were serious now, but there was a light in them that would not be quenched. As he carried her close, she had detected about him a strange odor, but now it was not so noticeable.

“You struck him,” she said again, still not believing what her own eyes had seen.

He himself was only just beginning to believe it. He looked at his fist and smiled.

“Hit him? I killed him!”

“You won’t smile when they catch us.” Her tone was somber.

Her eyes blazed with fear as he clapped a big hand over her mouth. But then she saw that he didn’t mean to harm her. He was listening, listening intently.

Then she heard it, the sound of a body moving through the underbrush. The sound was near the hollow now, and the tawny man removed his hand from her mouth and glided away. At the lip of the hollow, he paused.

More movement and sound, and the brush parted. The tawny man leaped forward, ready to strike. He caught himself in midair, his hands unclasp- ing before he landed.

“An Earthman!”

The intruder turned, his eyes wild with fright. He was short, dark, thick as an oak tree through the chest. A day’s growth of black beard sprouted on his face, black hair curled up at the throat of his tunic.

“I...I...” he mumbled, still bewildered. “Wha—?”

“You’re all right,” the tawny one told him. “How did you get up here?”

“I was on my way to work, at the factory. I took the wrong road, un- thinking. I would have been an hour late. They would have punished me. So I kept going.”

“Your name?”

“Crag. Ben Crag.”

“I’m Reb Stuart,” the tawny one said. He looked to the girl.

“Loa,” she said simply.

THEY TOLD Crag, as they went on upward, how they came to be here, and there was a long pause while he demanded the details. In the end, he had to believe them. No one could have imagined such a thing.

“To strike a Martian,” he muttered. “How could you even think of such a thing?”

“I didn’t stop to think,” Stuart admitted. “Now, come on. The cave is up ahead.”

"What cave?"

But Stuart was silent. He plunged ahead now, taking them further into the wild hills. They went down a slope, up another, and suddenly they were stopped before a thick clump of bushes.

Stuart pushed the bushes aside, revealing an opening behind them. The girl and Crag followed him through, into what seemed a small cave. Stuart vanished briefly into the half gloom and then reappeared with something white.

He scratched a match and the white thing flamed. It was a tall candle. Stuart set the candle in a niche while Crag and Loa looked about.

The cave was not small, but huge. In a far corner, there were great kettles of copper and coils of copper tubing. Casks and jugs stood against the walls.

"What are those?" Loa asked. Stuart shrugged his shoulders.

"How did you find this place?" Crag wanted to know.

"I played near here as a child. I still come here often, and one day recently I found it. Probably been waiting here like this since the days of the Authority."

"That long?" Loa whispered.

"It can't be as long as we think," Stuart told her. "I had a great-grandfather who claimed Effdee Arr was a man, not a spirit."

Crag snorted. "And I suppose the Authority who protected the Valley was also a man!"

He shook his head at Stuart. Of course, a man who could strike a Martian might think of anything. That had to be considered.

"What made you strike him?" Crag demanded.

"Felt like it. That's all I know. I suddenly felt like it." Stuart shrugged, disclaiming motive. But, suddenly, his eyes were alight.

"It must have been the strong water!" He ran to a cask and turned a spigot. Clear, colorless liquid spurted.

"It had an odor, but I thought it would be safe to drink," Stuart said. "So I had some before I went down today. It burned, but it made me feel good. It made me feel sort of wild."

He let some run into his cupped palms and offered Crag a drink. The thick man gulped, gasped, sputtered and choked. The odor, both he and Loa noticed, was the same as what had been on Stuart's breath.

"It—it can't be water," Crag said huskily. "But what is it?"

"Perhaps something made by a strange process with these utensils," Stuart shrugged. "How do you feel?"

"Odd." Crag seemed confused. "I feel warm. But good. I feel strong."

"Never mind how you feel!" That was Loa, anger and fear mixed in her tone. "How will we feel when they catch us? I've seen men flayed for pleasure, tortured for diversion. Think what they'll do to us."

There was silence while they considered the terrifying possibilities. Then, suddenly, Reb Stuart's face contorted with anger. He lifted his hands and stared at them.

"Do to us?" he shouted. "Think! Think! With these hands I killed one of them! They're Martians, but they die! Twist hard enough, and their bones will break. Squeeze, and they'll choke. Just like you and I. Just like Earthmen."

His voice faded to a hoarse whisper. "What they'll do to us? Think what we might do to them!"

"You've gone mad!" The two voices were as one.

STUART whirled on them.

"No, I'm not mad. And it isn't the strong water. That's out of me now. I'm awake, and I know my

strength. You, Crag, what was your job?"

"I supervised. A hundred workers."

"Then you've had training. You're no fool. Nor I. I was overseer for a farm. I can fix machines. You, Loa?"

"Repairs on small fighting craft."

"You see?" Stuart demanded. "We have hands, we have brains. Once men walked this earth. Men! Our ancestors must have left the strong water just to show me the way. Now I know what can be done."

Loa laughed weakly and Ben Crag echoed her. Wild talk, crazy talk.

"Just three of us," Loa said. "Against all the dragons of Mars."

"Just three," Stuart admitted. "But three seeds. I've planted seeds and watched them grow."

He waved their protests away. "What can they do to us that they wouldn't do now? What can we lose?"

This time, there was a moment's pause before they replied. Loa was watching him, and in her eyes there was a light of admiration, of more than admiration.

"Lose? Nothing," she said. "When do we start?"

"Right now. We investigate this cave."

Holding the candle aloft, he took the lead. The cave narrowed, then widened again into a great chamber. More casks, but nothing else. Nothing but a small cave and a larger one. And yet, Stuart didn't seem discouraged.

"Room here for a hundred," he said. "They'd never find us here."

"What good's a hundred?" Crag demanded. "And how will we get them?"

"Go back."

He said it simply, as though he were asking them to return from a short walk. But he might have exploded a shell with less dramatic results.

"Now I know you're crazy!" Crag

said with a snort.

"Maybe not. I looked back a few times coming up here. The two ships took off. There was no chase. They'd never think of an Earthman killing a Martian. So they must have thought this one fell and broke his neck."

Stuart shrugged. "Sure, I'll take a beating. So will you, Crag. But they don't generally kill supervisors. And I guess we've been beaten before."

"With less to gain," Crag admitted. "But who—?"

"Pick a man, maybe two. We each know at least one we can trust. One who'd be useful."

Crag rubbed his stubbly chin. The doubt was gone now, and there was the beginning of belief. Somehow, Stuart had made him see this thing. Somehow, it could be done. Three lives—against a planet to gain.

"My hand," said Ben Crag. His fingers were like bands of metal.

"And mine," said Loa. Stuart took it gently.

THE BEGINNING was not easy.

In a corner of the room, a large machine stood. And on a dais behind it a Martian of rank, jewels glittering on his uniform. His eyes surveyed the tall Earthman flanked by two guards.

"You did not get lost," the Martian said. Actually, he had no suspicion; it was just a formality, an old routine which once had meaning.

"I lost my way," the Earthman said quietly.

"We'll see. Strap him in."

The guards moved quickly, hustling the big man with the tawny hair toward the machine. His arms fitted into loops of metal, his chest pressed against a metal plate. Behind him, another plate swung inward against his back.

"Once," the Martian said.

Stuart's body jerked. Tongues of

living flame etched their way across his bare back, ate into him. He wanted to scream, and bit his lips to hold back the scream.

"I lost my way," he said dully.

"Of course. You'll remember not to do it again. Once more."

Again the flame biting into him, and this time a thousand times worse. Agony added to agony. His teeth met through the flesh of his lip and blood ran over his chin.

"I'll remember," he said.

"Of course. Once more, to make certain he remembers."

And this was the worst. Worse than a thousand beatings. Worse, it seemed to Stuart, than death itself. Excruciating pain, a thousand times compounded.

Better to have told, his mind said. Six hundred years of serfdom had left their mark. But instinct was stronger. His teeth clamped down again, and there was the salty taste of blood in his mouth. . . .

AND IN ANOTHER room, in a room much the same, except that it was in a factory rather than the hydroponics division of a farm, a similar scene was taking place.

The Martian wore the same sort of jewels, there were the two guards, and there was an Earthman. This Earthman was short, dark, wide as a door across the shoulders.

"There was a *taken*. I was stopped by dragoons," the Earthman said.

"You should have explained to them," came the reply.

"I tried. They did not want to listen."

"Beast. If you'd had the intelligence to explain properly. . . . But it's true they are somewhat impulsive. Well, once will teach you." The gurgling voice rose. "Once. Full strength."

And again the agony of flame etching its way across a man's back. And

again a man tasting salt blood as he bit back the screams.

The girl was fortunate. She had not missed a moment's work. She worked her regular shift, fourteen hours without rest or food.

SEEDS, nourished with blood, and they fell on barren ground. A week, another week, and there were only six in the cave. Four men and two women; no more.

The male newcomers were brothers; tall, gaunt men with shallow chests and high foreheads. They were Paul and Verne Richards, recruited from the factory by Crag. Their mother had been carried away twenty years before, and their sister in the last *taken*.

Loa had brought the woman. This one had shoulders almost as wide as Crag's and stood an inch taller. Thick black hair flew about her heavy, hard features. She was not unpleasant to look at, only rough hewn. Her hands were big and calloused. Her name was Molly Pitch.

"Women," Crag grunted sourly when he saw her. "It's men we need."

Loa was embarrassed, but the other woman patted her shoulder. "It's those stripes they gave him. Spoils your disposition for a while."

"How do you know I got stripes?" Crag demanded.

"Your lips." She reached out and ran a surprisingly gentle finger across his lips. "If you've got guts, you bite back the screams."

"You know a lot, don't you?" He glared at her, and then his eyes widened. On her lower lip was a long scar where the lip had been bitten through.

"But they never do that to women!"

"Don't they?" the rough woman laughed. "Some time I'll tell you a few of the things they've done to me."

It'll curl your hair."

Then the laughter had fled her voice. She glared around. "Well? What are we here for?"

Leadership had fallen to Reb Stuart from the first, and now it was he who did the talking. His face was glum as he surveyed the three newcomers. His tawny eyes, once easy and relaxed, were now hard and direct.

"We can't get others to join us. Two weeks, and there are only six of us. Do you want to know why?"

Five heads nodded. "You believe in this, don't you? You believe that if one Martian can be destroyed, they can all be destroyed. Right?"

The heads bobbed again. They didn't know where this line was taking him, but they listened. His eyes were hot now, seeming to spark.

"But nobody else believes it! Nobody else knows it! Crag told you fellows because he could trust you. Loa told Molly. But nobody else knows how that Martian died. They wouldn't believe it if we told them. We've been afraid even to hint at it."

"True," Verne Richards interrupted, his thin, clever face puzzled. "But what's the answer?"

"This. Hang out a banner that men with guts will flock to! Show them something that will open their eyes!"

"Like what?" Richards demanded.

Stuart told them.

THROUGH high haze the quarter-moon glowed faintly. Against the darkness of the night, the square administration building was but a dark-er block. Six figures crept toward it.

Stuart and Crag each shouldered a heavy sack. The Richards brothers swung another between them. Molly and Loa were empty handed.

"All right," Stuart whispered.

They were within fifty yards of a corner of the building when they dropped to the ground. They waited.

And in a while, their patience was rewarded. Two guards appeared, one around the corner and one from the further end of the building.

It was a meaningless vigil they kept, a patrol for which there had never been any necessity. But orders were orders; they spoke for but a few seconds, then resumed their ordered pacing. One disappeared around the far corner, the other came toward the six figures.

Stuart stirred, touched the big woman's muscular arm. "All right, Molly."

She rose and moved off, her steps strangely silent on the hard ground. She was almost on the guard before he saw her. His arms swung up.

"What is it?" he growled.

"I was ordered to bring something." She was quite close now, peering into his face. "It must have been another guard." And then her gaze swivelled. "Oh, there he is!"

She had learned her part well. The guard's eyes followed hers, widened with astonishment as he saw no one. Then, steel fingers closed about his throat.

While the five waited, frozen with tension, a terrible struggle began. Stuart could have silenced him quickly, so could Crag. But they had had to risk this. A woman had a better chance to get close without arousing suspicion.

And Molly Pitch was incredibly strong. The guard flung himself around, tore at his throat to loose the grip that was choking him. His heels raked her shins. But she clung grimly, bore him to earth and held until he went limp, his final paroxysm over.

Then, quickly, her hands were at his belt. He wore a knife in a short scabbard, a gun in a holster. Molly chose the knife. As she darted around the corner, it gleamed dully in her hand.

"Now!" Stuart ordered.

They were up and moving as fast as they could. The time for caution was over. If Molly succeeded, well and good. If not, it wouldn't matter anyway.

By the time they reached the building, she was already coming back, her square face lit by a grin of triumph. She still had the knife and it was wet.

And now, Paul Richards took over. He and his brother had worked in mines. They knew how to set a charge, where to place it so that it would do the most good.

There was none of the explosive in the sacks to waste. It had taken weeks of patient pilfering to garner this much.

A whole sack went against the corner of the building, a half sack along each of the adjacent sides, smaller portions at strategic points on the far walls. Then it was done, and the brothers were stringing fuses. A light flickered and died.

"Run for it!"

They ran, ran as fast as they could. A half mile away, they were still running, when behind them flame erupted skyward. The ground shook. For a moment they paused, steadied themselves, then ran on.

The second blow had been struck.

"I DON'T get it," Ben Crag growled. "Two weeks since we blew that place, and nothing happens. It ain't right, and it's got me worried."

The meeting had been over for a while and there were only the four, Loa, Molly, Crag and Stuart left in the cave. Crag had been pacing the floor worriedly, and now at last he had spoken aloud what many had been thinking.

Stuart watched him. The tawny man had changed. There was still that

recklessness in his eyes, and the hint of violence, but leadership had changed him some. He was silent now, more often than not.

He had guessed right about the effect of spectacular action. Over a hundred men now in the immediate organization, and the number limited only by their inability to screen men more rapidly. A hundred picked men, Stuart had felt, were more important at the start than ten thousand with the chains of slavery still binding their minds.

"Something's happened," he said now. "Ten men have died, and I'd swear every last one confessed to the crime he didn't commit."

"But not a single proclamation, not a—"

"Naturally. Akrim's no fool. As governor of the province, he can't afford to admit publicly what happened. But now, if his superiors find out, he can claim he handled the whole thing quietly, stamped out the revolt before it got started."

"Ah," Crag said. "So that's it. Makes sense, all right." But admiration of Stuart's reasoning did not wipe out his frown. "Akrim might know better, though."

"That's what I'm worried about," Stuart admitted. "Sooner or later..." He looked up as four men entered the cave. "Something more to worry about."

HE HAD NOTICED these four often. Recruited from a quarrying gang, they stuck together closely. Physically they were giants, all of them a full head taller than Stuart's six feet two inches. As they lumbered forward, their tangled masses of hair swaying, they looked like a matched team of draught animals.

"Yes?" Stuart said quietly.

"Want to talk to you," one replied gruffly. He glowered at Crag.

"You can say what you have to." Stuart was curt.

The glare shifted to him. "Damn right we'll say it. We don't like this setup. Who gave you the right to order us around? Steal a drill, bring in a sack of high explosive, do this, do that—"

"Anything else?"

"Yeah." The giant's head jerked toward Loa. "No risks, and the finest wench—"

Reb Stuart hit him. There was no warning; the transformation from relaxed silence to unleashed fury was instantaneous. All the weight and strength of his body flowed upward in a single blow that ended at the point of the giant's jaw.

Like a tree toppling, the huge man crashed. He was no Martian; it would take a sledge to crack his neck. But he was going to be out for quite some time.

Caught off guard, his companions stood frozen into immobility. Then, one of them swung forward.

Until then, Ben Crag had made no move. Now, he swung into action. A full foot and a half shorter than any of them, he was more than their equal in width. And he had the advantage of a lower center of gravity.

His swinging shoulder caught one across the middle, bunting him aside. A thick hand shot out, paused as it hit a chest, then continued hard. There was the crash of a body against the far wall of the cave. Only one left now.

"You wanted to know," Crag said. "You still want to know?"

The man shook his head dumbly, edging off. He wanted no part of this squat Hercules with the ugly, good humored face. Nor of the tawny man who could appear so deceptively quiet.

The first one still lay on the floor of the cave. The other two had re-

gained their feet, still groggy but able to move. Crag jerked his head and the three lifted their prostrate companion and carried him out.

"And that's the end of that," Ben Crag grinned.

But Reb Stuart had no answering grin. His face was serious, his eyes half closed in thought.

"No," he said. "That's the beginning. It was bound to happen sooner or later. Just as Akrim is bound to ferret out this cave."

"By that time," Molly Pitch said, coming into the conversation, "we'll have a thousand men."

"A thousand men, and not even enough small arms stolen to supply fifty. We couldn't stand off a single platoon."

Ben Crag's face was getting duskier. "What kind of talk is that? You sound like you want to give it up!"

"You know Reb better than that." Loa put her hand on Stuart's arm, ranging herself alongside him.

His appreciation showed itself in one of the few smiles they had seen in a long time. "I'm not quitting. But I do know just how far we can go this way."

"Then what's the answer?"

"We need a new base of operations, where the Martians can't get to us."

"But there's no place on Earth like that!"

"I know. It won't be on Earth."

Molly Pitch went wide-eyed, and Ben's mouth opened foolishly. It was Ben who got the words out first: "You've been drinking that strong water again!"

BUT IT WAS not drink. This thing had been on Stuart's mind a long time. For many days, the realization had grown and been strengthened.

As long as their base remained on Earth, they were doomed to failure. Akrim might be slow, but once he

realized there was a definite threat to Martian rule, he would act.

The Earthmen wouldn't stand a chance. Outnumbered, weaponless, without a semblance of military training, their attempt at revolt would end in massacre.

Hotter heads had demanded some kind of action. But Stuart had put those ideas down with a firm hand. Overt action would produce instant retaliation.

So he had conceived this plan, thought it through no matter how mad it had seemed. To reconquer this planet, they had to forsake it. Do that, or fail. And now that his mind was set, there was no turning back.

IT WAS late, and he and Loa were alone. He lifted his eyes from the paper work he had been doing.

"You're sure of this fellow at the repair shops?"

"As sure as I can be. Molly and I have talked to him. He's a genius at motors; we know that. If he claims the fields can be stepped up without danger of burnouts, you can bet your life they can."

"We're betting our lives," Stuart reminded her. He stood up. "All right. That little patrol ship will definitely take off by tomorrow night?"

"We finish repairs tomorrow. They pick it up next morning."

"How about armament?"

"That's all set. Even food in the galley. Dion can step up the fields after we're in space, and from then on, we can travel as far and as fast as we must."

Stuart's smile was more than fond. "You believe in me, don't you?"

There was no need for verbal answer. Her eyes gave him all the reply he needed.

"Good. Then here's the final plan. Twenty-five of us will go. I've picked them already. The rest will remain

behind. Those will be the nucleus for a silent organization. From now on all direction will be from whatever base we pick in outer space.

"Everything here will go underground. As far as Mars is concerned, all organized resistance will have ended. I hope. A quick search and they'll give us up, probably. And that's when our real work will begin."

Dawn was purpling the sky as they left. Perhaps the last dawn of Earth they would ever see. Only a few minutes to clasp hands and dream their dreams and make their wishes.

Then, Stuart took Loa in his arms and kissed her, tasting the sweetness of her lips, feeling her softness against him. For this moment, he was only a man, with a man's need and passion. And she was the woman he loved.

IT WAS difficult to keep his mind on work. He had to go through the motions, and yet as the day wore on, he found himself making mistakes. Twice he over-acidized immense troughs containing millions of food plants, barely got the neutralizer flowing in time.

So when the guard came to conduct him to Sebrun, the farm manager, Stuart was inwardly calm. It was the end of a long day; the artificial sunlight had been on for an hour already. Sebrun would be tired. He'd content himself with a verbal lashing, a curse for Earthmen's stupidity, maybe a cuff or two.

Then, they were in Sebrun's office. And, suddenly, Stuart knew that this was no reprimand which awaited him. For Sebrun was not tired. Nor was he merely angry.

The Martian's manner was quiet, his eyes bright and hot. Even the jewels he wore seemed to glitter coldly. Tension crackled in the room, and instead of two guards, there were four.

"Well," Sebrun said. He templed long fingers and his manner became almost philosophical. "We should have expected it, I suppose. But then, military men don't know as much about heredity as you and I, eh Stuart?"

"I don't understand."

"Heredity. The innate bestiality, the animal cunning of your race. They shouldn't have expected to breed it out in twelve generations. It was bound to crop up."

He watched Stuart. "Still don't understand?"

"No."

Then, Sebrun seemed to go mad. He snatched up a paperweight and flung it. Involuntarily, Stuart dodged. The paperweight went past his head and smashed into the wall.

Sebrun was on him then. He smashed Stuart across the mouth, beat at him, kicked him, finally knocked him to the floor.

"The revolt! The sabotage! The destruction of the administration building! Do you understand that, you beast?"

One of the guards lifted Stuart by the hair and held him upright for Sebrun to hit again. But the tawny man held firm.

"I don't understand."

Maybe he could brazen it out. Maybe Sebrun had nothing concrete. It might be just another of those things, all suspicion and no facts. No matter what happened, he'd admit nothing.

Sebrun must have sensed the futility of further questioning. He whirled, shouted at one of the guards: "Bring him in!" Then, as the guard left by another door, he glared at Stuart. "You'll understand, all right!"

Inside, Stuart had turned to ice. So Sebrun had something. It was a question of how much. And that was a question which would be answered in a moment. The sound of feet was

in the corridor outside.

Stuart lifted his eyes. The door opened and an Earthman came in, followed by the guard. It was the giant from the quarry, the man Stuart had beaten the night before.

"Well?" Sebrun demanded.

The giant nodded. "It's him. He's the leader."

SO THIS was it. An hour later, and it wouldn't have mattered. Now, it mattered too much. He had foreseen something like this, but he hadn't foreseen it happening so soon.

For himself, it didn't matter so much. But there were the others to think about. There were Crag, and Molly Pitch, and Loa. Especially Loa.

"He lies!" Stuart shouted desperately. He smiled ingratiatingly at Sebrun. "There was a woman, and—"

"I said there was a woman," the giant cut in. "He'll know her name. He knows all of them."

Sebrun grinned, not pleasantly. "He'll tell. He'll tell us everything." Then, to the guard: "Take that one out. Double rations for a month. And a beating every day."

Stuart's mind raced. They'd never break him down. Sebrun couldn't do it; Akrim couldn't do it, either. Not all the diabolical tortures of this alien race could do it.

But that wouldn't stop them. They still had this huge thing that called himself a man. He couldn't name names, but he'd recognize a good many on sight. They'd parade every soul in the territory before him, and he could pick out enough.

There wasn't time to think further. There was only time to act. And with Reb Stuart, thought and action were miraculously synchronized.

Too fast to stop, he sprang. In a single swoop, he had the paperweight from the floor and was driving upward. He caught them completely un-

prepared. The guard was behind the huge Earthman. Stuart batted him out of the way and swung.

A crack like dry wood snapping, and the giant toppled, the side of his head caved in. He would never betray anyone.

"Grab him!" Sebrun yelled frantically. "Take him alive!"

Unable to use their guns, the guards piled in. Stuart met them head on, fists flailing. A skull cracked as the paperweight landed squarely. The force of the blow knocked the weight loose, but now Stuart had only four of them to face.

With half a chance, he might have succeeded. But they didn't give him that chance. They wouldn't let him get his back against a wall where he could take them all frontally.

From four sides, they came at him. Even as his iron fists shattered flesh and bone, there was a smash at the back of his neck that dazed him. He whirled, and caught another fist full in the face.

They were on him now, beating, kicking, jarring him, bearing him down beneath their combined weight. There wouldn't be much left for Sebrun to do, and Sebrun realized that.

"Enough," he commanded. "You'll kill him."

His voice came to Stuart as from a great distance. There was an immediate stop to hostilities. And, amazingly, there surged through Stuart a fresh burst of strength. He would never get the chance to use it, but it was there.

Or would he get the chance? For, suddenly, there was another voice, a familiar voice.

"Get 'em!" it roared. It was the voice of Ben Crag.

HHE CAME through the door and his shoulders barely made it. There was a gun in each hand. And

behind him came Molly Pitch, her fingers taut on triggers.

Sebrun spun, digging frantically for his own gun. Crag blasted away and a flash of fire seared the Martian, dropping him in his tracks.

The guards were coming awake now, but too late. Molly shot one down, bludgeoned a second with the barrel of her other gun. And now Stuart was back in action, his fingers a third.

"Come on!" Crag called, and then they were running.

One door led directly to the hydroponics section, the other through the offices. It was the second door through which Crag and Molly had come and through which the three now sped.

The corridors were deserted now, even the usual patrolling guards notable by their absence. Stuart had time to wonder, and then he stopped wondering. For fast as he was running, his eyes had caught sight of a charred figure slumped in a recess.

Then they were outside and slowing down, forced to walk rather than risk attracting attention. For Stuart, it was a welcome breather. The beating he'd taken hadn't helped any. He was thankful for the darkness which concealed the cuts and bruises he bore.

"How in the world—?" he began as they cut across a field.

"Someone saw that trouble maker from the quarry going into your buildings, and smelled something wrong. They reported at once to the cave, where Molly and I were getting things ready for tonight."

"It didn't take much figuring to see what was up," Molly said. She grinned. "The Martians aren't so tough. Only one guard around, and when Ben and I put the screws on him, he told us just where to find you."

"But the cave. He must have told them about that."

"We cleared out, figuring he would. We also passed on word of a change in plans. We rendezvous near the shops."

"Good thing, too," Molly said. "They've had men drifting up into the hills."

And that, Stuart exulted, was the one good break. It meant a diversion of the Martians' strength, less men to guard the shops. It might mean the difference between success and failure.

"The patrol ship ready?" he asked.

Molly grinned again. "They never got such fast work before. Or such efficient work. It's on the field, ready for a takeoff."

"And Dion, your motor wizard?"

"We smuggled him into the ship. Can't take a chance on him getting hurt."

IT WAS better than good; it was perfect. Almost perfect, anyway. It would have taken more men, heavier weapons, to make success certain. But given the diversion and the element of surprise, Stuart now figured the odds in their favor.

He and Molly and Crag were across the fields now and coming through the thin screen of trees that separated the town itself from the sprawling shops where a majority of its inhabitants worked. He could already see some of the shops; the rest were hidden behind the high wall that surrounded the field.

"The men will be waiting behind that dismantled space cruiser," Crag said, pointing out a huge hull.

Ducking low, they threaded their way across the intervening space. The moon was high now, and one slip could mean disaster.

But there was no slip. And the men were all there, hugging the ground, some of them even inside the hull.

Loa was there, briefing a group of ten. And Paul and Verne Richards were there, hugging close their sacks of explosive.

Loa would have come to Stuart's arms, but there were others in the way. Stuart cut their questions short with: "Later. We'd better get going. Everyone knows what he's supposed to do?" They nodded, and he turned to the group to which Loa had been speaking.

"You get a break. Some of their men are up in the hills. You might even break through. But even if you don't, make it seem like the real thing, like a real frontal attack. All set?"

They nodded grimly and Stuart said simply, "Good luck." Then they were off, cutting low and sharp across toward the front of the main building.

In a few seconds, they were lost in the darkness. Then, a short wait and they reappeared, this time very close to the main gate. Stuart heaved a sigh. It was working out.

Now, there were other figures, dimly visible behind the great bars. Voices rose and a giant light began its swing toward the gate.

Too late. A flash in the darkness, and then the high arc of something bright and sputtering. And then a roar, and in the beam of the searchlight the gate itself, lifting now from its foundations and tottering.

It fell in a cloud of dust, amid the shrieks of wounded men. There was the steady blast of pellet guns and the purple flashes of the smaller rays.

"Now!" Stuart called.

The Richards brothers were already on their way. He watched them dash to the wall, merge with its shadow. Then they were up and running again. They came back in a flying leap and hit the dirt and stayed there as the wall itself erupted.

And now there was no need for orders. Stuart led the charge, and be-

hind him came the rest, all of them racing for the great gap in the masonry.

No time for thinking now, just run, for through the gap the field was clearly visible, and on that field was a slender silver ship. Then they were through the gap and the ship only a few hundred yards away.

And now the Martians had come awake. They were deserting the gate, cutting back onto the field, as they realized their opponents' actual goal.

Stuart was down on one knee, dimly aware that beside him there were others. Still unfamiliar with their stolen weapons, they fired blindly but steadily.

A Martian went down, then another. The size of the attacking force threw them off balance and they faltered, fell back. And then were hit from the rear by the group which had blasted the main gate.

It was turning into a rout. Stuart was up and running again. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see that the defenders were being reorganized, but the chances were against their making it in time. The ship was close.

Then, one of the doors swung open and in the doorway, outlined by interior lights, stood a scrawny figure with a wizened, monkey face. Dion, Stuart thought.

The figure waved, yelled, "Come on!"

And then—disaster.

FROM OUT of nowhere, the Martians seemed to spring. Suddenly, there was a blast of fire from behind, and a man near Stuart went down.

Stuart whirled, fired blindly. And saw racing toward him a mass of men at least a hundred strong. Through the gap in the wall they poured, and now the tables were turned. Near Stuart another figure fell, then another.

His mind grasped the situation at

once. These were the ones who had gone up to the hills. Finding nothing, they had probably left a guard, the main body coming back. And had seen the signs of battle in time to get into the fray.

Everywhere now there were men shouting, screaming. The whole thing had turned into a wild melee. There was no use running, for now there was no place to run. Only one thing remained, to make it as costly a victory as possible, to go down fighting.

But Stuart had reckoned without Dion. Unheeded by either side, the patrol ship had lifted slightly and swung around. Now, the area of battle lay under the ship's heaviest guns.

Without warning, they blasted. Waves of sound overwhelmed Stuart's ears, making his head reel. Glare blinded him, and for a moment he stood helpless.

Then, he could see again. The rear ranks of Martians were gone. Only those in the front were left. And now they were too close for Dion to chance another blast.

For a minute it was hand to hand, short sword against short sword. And then the Martians fell back.

The ship dropped between the two groups, screening off the Earthmen. Again the doors were open, and this time there were but three strides needed to reach them.

Stuart worked like a madman, shoving others through. There was a jam and he got up above it by swinging into the ship. He hauled, pulled, yanked them up bodily.

And then the last one was in and the doors swung shut. A surge of power shook the ship and it tilted sharply. It lifted, seeming to tug at fetters that held it back. And then the fetters dropped and it was free and soaring.

For the first time in six hundred years, of their own volition, of their

own free will, Earthmen sailed the skies above Earth.

AT TWO hundred thousand feet, a whole squadron of small fighters swam into the view plates. Dismay clutched at Stuart's heart. It looked like Mars would have the last laugh.

Racing into the control room, he found Dion watching the small viewer with apparent disinterest. Completely at ease with the array of instruments, Dion gave them but a glance before turning to Stuart.

"Don't look so worried," the emaciated man grinned. "They won't get within fifty thousand feet of us. I had time to do some work on this baby."

He reached out for an improvised switch and cut it in. Instantly, there was a whine of fresh power that sent Stuart staggering back. He regained balance quickly enough to see the Martian fighters dwindling on the viewer.

"And that's just part of it," Dion grinned. He chortled gleefully. "I was too puny for hard work, so they taught me to fix motors. Bet they're sorry now."

"Not half as sorry as they're going to be."

"You got plans?"

"We didn't do this for a ride. What chance has a small fighter, another patrol ship or a freighter against us?"

"None, with the speed we've got." Suddenly Dion's face lit up. "Hey!"

"One at a time," Stuart told him. "We'll keep picking them off. Eventually have enough to tackle a battle cruiser. Meanwhile, the organization on Earth will keep growing, keep supplying more men."

He shrugged. It was a big dream, but at least he had seen it grow from even less than that. Someday, this

small patrol ship would be part of a great privateer fleet, this handful of men would be the nucleus of an army.

A big dream, with an infinite number of details to be filled in, he reminded himself. And the first of them should be the checking of the casualty list.

Coming out of the control room and into the crew's quarters, he found Ben Crag already busy tallying off the men. Molly Pitch was tearing a strip of cloth to use as a bandage for a flesh wound. Crag finished his tally as Stuart walked up to him.

"We lost six," Crag told him. "Not too bad."

"Not too bad," Stuart agreed. It was better than he had hoped for.

But Ben Crag's homely countenance was twisted in lines that foretold worse news yet to come. Stuart watched him, suddenly aware of a sinking feeling inside himself, and as his eyes widened in an unspoken query, Ben Crag nodded.

"One of them was Loa," he said.

HE KNEW he should pull himself together. For without him there could be no dream, no realization. Without a leader there was simply no spark, nothing to bind together a group of slaves and give them the hope they needed.

But try as he would, Stuart could not shake off his depression. Without knowing it, he had always placed Loa at the center of his own personal dream. And now that she was gone, the dream had no meaning for him.

"Listen, Reb," Crag pleaded, "you've got to pull out of this. It's got every one down, seeing you mope. The men are beginning to act worried and scared."

"I know. But I just can't help it. I'd like to be heroic and put up a front. But it would be a lie, and everyone would know it." He

shrugged. "I thought it was that liquor that made me hit the Martian. But it wasn't. It was Loa. Behind everything I've thought and done since then, there's always been Loa."

"I know. I know. But man! This is bigger than Loa, bigger than any of us."

Crag waved a massive arm at the communications set in the corner. It had been babbling away ever since their takeoff, with no one paying much attention to it. Now, for the first time, Stuart listened.

"They still can't believe it," Crag said. "They're going wild, wondering just what happened. Mars keeps demanding more information and not getting it."

He shook Stuart roughly. "And this is just the beginning! What about all those plans you had? Hundreds of years Earth's waited for a Reb Stuart. You can't—"

He broke off suddenly. There had been a change in the steady chatter of communications. Something was happening, something that might be important.

"Clear all channels!" a harsh voice was saying. "Clear all channels! This is the battle cruiser Setrim calling Intelligence Mars!"

"Proceed," came the reply. "Proceed, Setrim."

The message came over in the clipped style affected by military men since time immemorial.

"Report on completion of Instruction 3: Left Memfas immediately on receipt of instruction and proceeded to scene of action. Time elapsed, eight minutes."

"We found action concluded, with loss of one small patrol ship, Dron, Class Four. Enemy left five dead. One prisoner taken alive and unarmed."

"Prisoner is believed completely cognizant of future plans of subversive

Earth organization. Therefore, have taken her aboard—"

"Her!" Crag blurted. "It must be Loa!"

"Quiet!" Stuart commanded.

"—and will proceed directly to headquarters on Course Seven." There was a pause—then, "Await further instructions."

"No instructions. Continue on course."

IN THE SILENCE that followed, Stuart's head reeled. Loa was alive! But there was no happiness in that thought. She'd be better off dead than going to the fate that awaited her. There would be interrogation, and what that interrogation would be like, Stuart could well imagine.

Through a fog, Stuart heard Ben Crag yell, "Dion!"

The wizened little man came in, his bright eyes alert and questioning. "What's the matter?"

"Suppose we wanted to get on something called Course Seven. Could we do it?"

"Sure," Dion nodded. "Except for takeoff and landing and maneuvers, all travel between Earth and Mars is on nine set channels. You just flick a switch to get on the one you want."

"Then get us on Seven," Crag commanded.

"Hold it!" Stuart cut in. He at last understood what Crag was driving at. "You're crazy, Ben! We can't tackle a battle cruiser."

"We can and we will." That was Molly Pitch.

But Stuart was adamant. "No. We wouldn't have a chance. I don't care about myself, but we can't throw away nineteen lives and this ship for a mere gesture at saving one girl."

"Stop thinking about Loa. And about yourself," Molly snorted. "When they get Loa up there, they'll

make her talk. They'll find out the name of every group leader who remained behind. They'll squash our organization before it has a chance to spread. If they ever get Loa on Mars, we're licked. We might just as well be dead."

Stuart would have argued, but Molly and Ben were already calling for a vote. There was a show of hands. And after that, there was no use arguing. It was unanimous.

"All right," Stuart said. "Course Seven." He looked at Dion. "Can we outrun them?"

"Yeah, but not outgun them. We couldn't even dent their hull. But," he shrugged as though it didn't matter, "that's your worry."

IT WAS A chance in a million, but it was all the chance they had. As Dion had said, their guns couldn't dent a cruiser's impervious hull. Only subterfuge remained.

For all Stuart knew, Akrim might be aboard the Setrim. In that case, this small ship would run into a blast of fire that would turn it into a lump of molten metal. But there was always the chance that Akrim was not aboard, that he was too busy even to be listening to communications which had been silent for almost an hour.

"Calling the Setrim," Stuart said. He took a deep breath and started over. "Calling the Setrim."

"Yes?" came the reply.

"Akrim, governor of Blurij, requesting permission to overtake and come aboard for questioning of prisoner."

There was a long silence, long enough for a consultation with the Setrim's commander to have taken place. Then, at last, the curt, "Permission granted."

It might be a trick, a trap. But there was no time to think about that. Within minutes, the five-hundred-foot length of the Setrim ap-

peared on the viewer, a silvery cylinder that would have close to a hundred men inside.

"How do we handle it?" Stuart asked.

"They'll use magnetic grapples to haul us close and glue our hatch to theirs," Dion told him.

"Their hatch opens inward, same as ours?"

"Yeah."

Stuart's eyes were beginning to glow with a tawny light. "Good! We'll surprise them. We've got a chance."

"You're crazy," Dion said calmly.

Stuart laughed. This was the kind of man he liked. This was the kind they needed, the kind who'd take up a lost cause and fight it out. And because of that, no cause could ever be totally lost.

"What's the inside of a cruiser like?" he asked.

"Same as this, only bigger. And only eighty, ninety more men. That's all."

"Never mind. Suppose we're grappled, our hatches open, and you kick our motors over. Would we tear loose?"

"Maybe. But I don't think so."

"Then watch it. When I give the signal, just a slight kick. Enough to jar them."

Then, he left Dion to get the rest of the men ready. He found them checking over their guns, running fingers over the edges of their swords.

"Just about set," Ben Crag said. He swiped wickedly at the air with his sword.

"Save your strength," Stuart warned jokingly. He turned to Molly. "You've worked on these gun mounts. Can we get one loose in time?"

"Sure. Just retract them and take off three bolts."

She pulled a lever and one of the port guns slid back, the aperture seal-

ing automatically. Several twists, and she had a bolt free, then another.

"Better give me a hand," Molly said. "It's heavy."

Stuart grabbed it as it came loose. Four feet long and with a double casing. Impervious to heat, with no recoil whatever. Only one thing wrong; it weighed, as nearly as Stuart could tell, two hundred and fifty pounds.

"Here," Ben Crag said. He took it from Stuart, swung it lightly, cradled it in his arms and laughed.

"What a surprise for them!" he gloated.

And then it was time. Dion's voice came over the speaker, calling them to the hatch, warning them to brace themselves. On the viewer, the Setrim already loomed large: another minute and Dion had swung in close enough so the cruiser could not have used its heavy guns had it wanted.

Time was suspended, motion seemed to stop. Dion's voice crackled: "They've got their grapples out. Watch it."

A slight jar as the grapples took hold. There was the feeling of motion, gentle hands supporting the ship. Then, a scraping along the hull as the hatches sealed over each other.

Stuart had their own hatch already unlocked. He swung it open and directly opposite him the Setrim's hatch swung inward.

"Kick it!" Stuart yelled.

Dion kicked it. There was a sickening lurch.

BRACED though they were, the shock was terrible. Grimly they fought to stay upright, waited for the terrible hiss that would mean the seal had broken.

But the seal stayed fast. And now they had regained their balance. From the Setrim's hatch there were screams and shouts. The jolt had flung

the Setrim and its small parasite completely over, and any man not firmly anchored to something solid must have been fearfully buffeted.

Stuart was already racing across the hatchways. A face appeared opposite him, shouted a warning. The Setrim's hatch started to close.

But it was too late. Stuart had a foot in the doorway. He shoved his handgun blindly around the great hatch and sprayed flame. More shrieks, and the hatch gave way slightly.

Then, Ben Crag's mighty shoulder hit it and flung it inward all the way. A ray from a small gun curled around the edge and Crag shoved Stuart aside.

"Let me handle this," he grunted.

A geyser of flame erupted from the huge gun in his hands, flame that swept the corridor of the Setrim free of Martians and boiled through them and past them toward the control room of the cruiser. Walls glowed cherry red, forcing the Earthmen into the middle of the corridor as they charged forward.

Reinforcements appeared, spurred on by shouts from behind them. But no officer's command gave immunity from the terrible weapon in Ben Crag's hands. The reinforcements turned to charred flesh.

In the control room, a bejewelled Martian shouted insane orders at his communications officer, trying to get through a call for help. Crag swung the giant gun toward them and Stuart pushed him aside.

"Not in here!" The control room was the heart of the ship. Blast it, and the Setrim would be useless.

It was only a moment's delay, but it gave the Setrim's commander a chance to run. He was through a doorway at the other end of the room before Stuart could reach him.

Behind them there were the sounds

of battle, but Stuart's mind was fixed on the man who ran ahead. There was no weapon the Setrim could use to save itself now. No weapon except possibly one. And that was Loa!

The Martian slid around a corner, managed to reach a barred door as Stuart snapped a shot at him. The shot missed its mark and the door banged open. Before Stuart could fire again, the door was swinging shut.

Twenty feet to cover, and only a fraction of a second to cover it. Stuart flung himself forward in a desperate leap.

His body hit, widening the tiny crack between door and lock. And from behind the door, there came the grunt of a man whose strength was being overtaxed.

NOW, IT WAS a question of brute force. Neither man could see his opponent. Neither dared to fire around the door for fear that even a momentary letup on his part would give victory to the other.

But for Stuart, there was no doubt. He had to win, he had to force that door open. And he was winning! The crack was widening, imperceptibly at first, and then steadily.

And then the door swung suddenly wide, sending Stuart plunging blindly across the room. Loa was there, he had guessed right about that. For the fraction of a second, he had a glimpse of her out of the corner of his eye.

But there was no time to look. In a single continuous motion he was twisting, rolling over and over as he tried desperately to avoid the tongue of flame that followed him.

Nor could he fire back. Shooting blindly, he had as much chance of hitting Loa as of hitting his opponent. As he came out of his roll, Stuart saw the commander take aim carefully.

There was no time to fire. There was only time to continue the move-

ment of his arm and let go of the gun. It sailed out, sailed true and straight into the Martian's face.

And right behind the gun came Stuart. A shot lanced past him, and then he was on top of the Setrim's commander. His hand clamped on a thick wrist and twisted. A gun fell with a clatter to the floor.

Long fingers gouged at Stuart's eyes, forcing his head back. The edge of a palm sliced at his unprotected throat. He had to let loose his own grip, had to give ground.

The two broke. And when they came at each other again, the Martian had his sword in his hand. Stuart ducked, whirled wide and around the other, got his own sword out of its scabbard.

And now it was Stuart who was on the defensive. He was no match at all for the accomplished swordsman who faced him. Foot by foot he was driven back, forced into untenable positions with the leering green face close to his own.

He slashed wildly, felt steel hit steel. And this time, the Martian gave ground. Stuart's heart leaped. In sheer strength, he was superior. If he could devote all his energies to defense, he would wear the other down.

Again the swords clashed, and again it was the Martian who gave way. His wrist was not as flexible as it had been. He pressed close, battling grimly to get home the one thrust that was needed.

And could not. Stuart had given up trying to reach him, was concentrating solely on parrying each thrust at arm's length. Another time the swords met, and again. The Martian seemed to weaken. He withdrew slightly and Stuart heaved a sigh of relief.

"Look out!" Loa screamed.

Like a dagger, the short sword flew through the air, flung in a last des-

perate effort. Like a dagger, it sought Stuart's throat. Caught totally unprepared, he seemed certain to die.

BUT REB STUART was no ordinary man. His reflexes were more feline than human. In midair, his body twisted, his head jerked aside. Only the hilt of the flying sword touched his throat as it sped by.

And now it was the Martian who could not alter course in time. Already charging forward, he could not stop. Eyes wide with horror, he came full tilt onto the point of Stuart's sword, and his own weight drove it into and through him.

Then, Loa was in his arms and he was holding her tight. There had been some questioning already, Stuart saw. Her skin was bruised and raw in numerous places.

"I wouldn't tell them anything," Loa whispered. "They were going to—"

Stuart's kiss cut off the rest of it. He was still holding her, his lips glued to hers, when Crag and Molly burst into the room.

"We got 'em all!" Ben shouted. "Every one of them! This whole damn cruiser is ours!"

Only a moment of jubilee when he and Molly embraced Loa, and then they had to recount every detail of the battle for the Setrim. It had been a vicious battle, but a short one.

"And just think!" Crag exulted. "A battle cruiser!"

Stuart was thinking. With this ship and what Dion could do to it, there was nothing that could touch them, nothing that could beat them.

Freighters would fall like apples from a tree into their hands. Fighting ships would run or be defeated. Ship by ship, the fleet would be built. And all the while, preparations would continue on Earth. Until, one day—

His thoughts broke off as he stared through a porthole. Earth was visible, two of its continents clearly defined as the planet swung on its orbit.

Stuart pointed through the porthole and the others followed his gaze. He finished his thought aloud: "Until, one day, Earth will be free."

They nodded in silent amen.

THE MUNROE MASHER

By
JUNE LURIE

PROMINENT in the news today because of the Korean War is the invention of a calm quiet ordnance man by the name of Munroe. Many years ago he produced an armor-piercing projectile whose importance cannot be underestimated. It is in back of almost all new tank-destroying weapons. It is the principle of the "hollow" or "shaped" charge and it doesn't rely on tungsten tipped high velocity shells. Instead it employs a flame squirting technique that goes through armor like a hot knife through cream cheese.

The hollow charge projectile whether fired from an artillery piece or a bazooka rocket or any other weapon works on the principle that an explosion may be focused just like light. The nose of a projectile is filled with explosive but down its center axis it is hollowed out in the shape of a cone, hence the name "hollow" charge. When this strikes a surface and explodes, the powder or explosive is focused into a

pencil or cylinder of ravaging, incandescent gases which literally chew and melt their way through armor of almost any thickness. And having penetrated the armor, they spread flame and molten metal everywhere behind it. No metals or armor made can stand against such a devastating force. Relentlessly it burrows through like a mole through earth and then destroys whatever exists behind the partition it has penetrated.

Some authorities think this is the end of the tank as we know it. Some claim that the hollow charge has revolutionized warfare. They point out the speed with which the Korean offense with tanks collapsed when American soldiers used three-and-a-half inch bazooka rockets of the hollow charge type. War techniques as well as fortunes ebb back and forth so we can't say this is finality. But it's a cinch that the hollow charged projectile of the future are going to be even more devastating!

"COOL WELDING"

By TOM LYNCH

THE OLDEST system in the world for joining two pieces of metal is by welding. The old smiths would put two hot pieces of metal together and beat them with a hammer until they fused together into one piece. Then came the oxy-acetylene torch and electric welding until nowadays the application of welding techniques to an infinite variety of things is common. You can hardly find a gadget which hasn't been welded somewhere.

Welding is a complicated tricky business however and the high temperatures necessary often preclude its use in a lot of places. An ex-English RAF flyer, a student scientist of no mean ability, decided to look into welding techniques a little further. He's come up with a honey that promises to revolutionize the business. It's called cold welding and it's so idiotically simple that you'll kick yourself for not thinking of it too.

The scientist asked himself, "Why can't I just press two pieces of metal together? They ought to stick." The reason he thought of this was that he'd noted several times when he'd pressed two pieces of copper together in a press and then pulled them apart, they'd come apart at another place than the pressure line which joined them. He put the thought into action.

The result is the new process called cold welding, and which is being experimented with in every factory in the world. It promises great things. The two pieces of metal, similar or dissimilar, ferrous or non-ferrous, are placed together, inserted in a powerful hydraulic press and forced

together under pressure. Presto, they stick!

That's all there is to it. The joints, when sliced through in section and examined under a microscope are found to be legitimate welds, the metals flowing together just as if they'd been melted. It seems so obvious, so reasonable, but it took until now to get into actual practice.

The uses for cold welding are incredibly numerous. Because there is no heat, delicate impossible operations can be done. Because dissimilar metals like aluminum and copper, or magnesium and steel can be joined, new structures and devices are possible. In addition, cost is cut down.

Unquestionably in the next few years we shall see the process used on a large scale and on every conceivable device. Cold welding is here to stay. If you want to see an example of the system try squeezing a couple of wires together in a vise—you might be surprised at the result!

Cold welding is going to eliminate a lot of soldering too. That means that other conductors, like aluminum, can replace precious copper which is in such short supply everywhere. At one stroke our natural resources are given a swift kick into generous enlargement. Out of the workshop and the laboratory come such clever ideas which make for fuller living. As long as there are such resourceful human minds in the world, it is doubtful if even the atomic bomb will ever be able to convert the Earth into a wasteland. The mind is too powerful and sensible for that. Witness obvious cold-welding!

★ ★ ★

PURE THEORY...?

By CAL WEBB

"ENOUGH of that theory stuff," people often cry, "give us the Facts!"

While that yell is often valid enough, particularly in light of all the hot air we hear today, theorists have plenty of place in the scheme of things. One of the best examples of the value of theoretical speculation is in a study of the kinetic theory of gases, which is a mouth filling phrase for the study of what we now call "molecules."

When gases were first dealt with scientifically, it was in the laboratory, and useful accurate laws were evolved from experimental evidence, without ever once questioning exactly what the nature of a gas was. The study of their pressures and temperatures, the way they absorbed heat and their mathematical behavior were sufficient to some scientists. Others, of a more speculative turn of mind, liked to consider gases as made of countless billions of tiny little billiard balls called molecules, which continually bounced around bump-

ing into each other. They didn't claim that this picture was so; they merely liked to think of gases that way as a method of reasoning further about them.

The conservatives led by a heat-expert named Meyer, vehemently denied the existence of these hypothetical molecules and said that even thinking about them would lead to no good. Enough, he maintained, could be learned by just regarding the thermodynamic aspects of gases.

The results of the dispute are now obvious. We know now for a fact that molecules do exist, even though they began life as a theory. Imagining them as scientists have done led to the discovery of many new properties and laws.

All of which demonstrates that it pays to have original ideas no matter how idiotic they may seem (or unnecessary) at the time. If they help you think, use them. If you like to think of electrons for example as tiny green spheres, do so, if it helps you to reason about electricity!

FIND ME IN

By Robert Moore Williams

In every physical way they seemed to be identical. But one question remained a mystery: which one of them was a superman?



WHEN Harold Miller returned from his fishing trip, he was a day late in getting home and he was expecting to catch a little hell from his wife for being late but he wasn't expecting to run slam-bang into the problem that was waiting for him. Pulling into the driveway beside the house he occupied in the suburbs, he stopped the car in front of the garage and got out, expecting his wife to come out the back door and say "Hello" and maybe give him a big hug, she being an affectionate girl who could usually hardly wait. But she didn't show.

One of the neighbor's kids had been playing in the drive, getting out of

ETERNITY



"If you're supposed to be my husband," she said angrily, "then who is that?"

the way of the car. When Miller got out, he said, "Hi" to the kid. The youngster didn't answer. Instead the kid, who was about eight, took a long steady look at him, then went yikety-yikety straight for the back door of his own house, yelling for mama at the top of his voice.

The kid's actions surprised Miller. Just the sight of him didn't usually scare kids into conniption fits, especially not ones who knew him. But this kid had acted scared. He saw the kid and his mother in the kitchen of the house next door, the kid pointing at him and the mother staring hard at him through the glass. He waved at her, to show her he hadn't run over or otherwise damaged her offspring, then went up the back steps of his own house, expecting to find his wife in the kitchen and maybe cooking up something good for him to eat. But the door was locked and his wife wasn't in the kitchen.

"Probably shopping," he thought. Unlocking the back door, he went into the house. The place smelled musty, the way a house does when all the windows are closed. Thrust under the front door was a yellow envelope, a telegram, which he opened. It was his own telegram which he had sent the day before telling his wife he would be a day late in returning home.

Obviously, she had not received it. Since the time stamp showed it had been delivered the day before, she hadn't been home since yesterday.

It was a situation that will cause a man to wonder. Miller and his wife got along fine; he didn't think she was stepping out on him or had left him. But the telegram under the door took the wind out of him. He searched the house for a message from her, found nothing. The place was in order, there was no sign of a struggle, she hadn't been robbed or attacked, at least not here. Then

where was she?

Miller was a bio-chemist—the calm type. He was employed as a research assistant by the Gerontology Foundation, a large, privately-financed foundation doing research in the field of gerontology, the scientific study of the phenomena of old age. It was quite a field. In actual fact the Foundation was not so much interested in the phenomena of old age as it was in discovering a method to keep men from growing old. Its aim was simple—immortality. Since it never expected to reach that goal and wasn't too sure the goal was worth reaching, its more practical goal was to discover ways and means by which men could live to the age of a hundred—and retain their physical and mental powers. Or two hundred.

WITH THIS goal in mind, the Foundation had no difficulty in finding all the money it needed to operate. All it had to do when it wanted money was to reach out and tap the nearest millionaire who was getting along in years and ask him if he wanted to make a small contribution to the Fountain of Youth, and stipulate that if the research was successful the donors would get first crack at the results. How to keep from growing old, how to keep from dying, how to dodge the old man with the scythe, this was the problem they were trying to solve. The rather pompous but usually pleasant director, Dr. George Claxton, always managed to find money when it was needed.

The research program was getting results too. Not practical results as yet, not the way to take a sixty year old man and turn him into a kid of thirty, but hints, clues, tips which led them to believe that the problem would eventually be solved. Another ten years of research might do it. A lucky break might do it. Lucky

breaks had solved many a problem in research. Why not this one?

Harold Miller was thinking of going next door and asking his neighbor if she knew where his wife was when he saw the squad car pull up in front of the neighbor's house. Two cops got out of it and started up the walk. Mrs. Atkinson, his neighbor, her eight-year old son with her, went running down to meet them.

"What's going on?" Miller thought. A conference immediately began in front of Mrs. Atkinson's house. She pointed toward his house, and was apparently talking a blue streak. The cops nodded. They moved toward Miller's house, one going toward the front door, the other moving around to the back, apparently to cut off his line of retreat in case he chose to try to flee in that direction.

The sight of the law moving in on him gave Miller a shock. His wife gone, the cops coming for him. At least he assumed they were coming for him. As a knock sounded, he went promptly to the front door. Mrs. Atkinson, the kid, and the cop were there.

The kid yelled: "That's him."

Mrs. Atkinson said: "There he—" Then she shut up, staring at Miller as if she was seeing a ghost.

Harold Miller said: "Okay, here I am." He was irritated.

The cop said: "What are you doing in this house?" He wasn't very polite about it either.

"What's it to you, what I'm doing in this house? I own it, me and the mortgage company, that is." Since he was a home-owner and a taxpayer and he was in his own home, he didn't propose to take much guff from cops, especially from cops who asked silly questions. "Why can't I be in this house?"

The cop was taken aback. He looked Miller up and down and

turned to Mrs. Atkinson. "Do you know this man?"

"Why—" She said the same word three times, her voice getting fainter each time she opened her mouth. When she finished, she was down to a whisper.

"Just what is going on?" the cop demanded. "You call us to come out here. You say there is an intruder in this house. The intruder comes to the door and says he owns the house. I ask you if you know him and all you say is—'Why—'. Is this man a trespasser or isn't he?"

MRS. ATKINSON swallowed hard. She kept looking at Miller and then looking away and then looking back at him as if she was expecting him to disappear between looks. "He—he looks like Mr. Miller. He—he talks like Mr. Miller. But he just can't be." She was wringing her hands and looked as if she wasn't a bit happy with Harold Miller, with herself, or with the police.

"Why can't I be Harold Miller?"

"Because you're in the hospital," Mrs. Atkinson answered. "You were hurt in an automobile accident yesterday afternoon. The hospital called your wife. She came over and told me what had happened and said she was going to the hospital right away. Later, she called me from the hospital and said you were there, that you were unconscious but that you didn't seem to be too badly hurt, and that she was going to stay there with you last night. She asked me to keep an eye on things. When I saw you come—well, I called the police."

"Uh!" Miller said.

"How can you be in the hospital and here too?" Mrs. Atkinson said.

"It does seem to be a problem," Miller answered. He was beginning to feel a little dazed. Obviously a mistake had been made. He didn't

quite see how it could have been made, since presumably his wife would recognize that the man in the hospital was not the Harold Miller she had married, but apparently it had been made. "What hospital am I supposed to be in?" he asked.

"Presbyterian Memorial," Mrs. Atkinson answered.

"And my wife is there too?"

"I—I guess so. That's where she went."

"Then that's where I'm going too."

Convincing the police that a mistake had been made was not difficult. His driver's license did the trick. He got back into his car and burned the wind to the hospital.

"Harold Miller?" The receptionist at the hospital consulted her file. "Room 713. Visiting hours three to five." Miller went up in the elevator. But he didn't reach room 713. Or not right away.

Just to the right of the elevator as he got off was a conference room where members of the patient's family could get together with the doctors. A conference was in progress when Miller walked past. His wife was there. So were two of his best friends, Ed Groff and George Clairborne. Both were bio-chemists working with him for the Foundation. Apparently, thinking he had been hurt, they had come to the hospital to see him. They were talking to his wife.

Miller made a sharp right turn and swung into the room. "Hi," he said.

All talk ceased instantly. The room got very quiet. . . Clairborne took one look at him and moved two steps away. Groff blinked at him from behind thick spectacles. His wife sat in her chair. Her eyes were focused on his face but from the way she looked, he was willing to bet she wasn't seeing him clearly.

"Who—who the hell are you?" Clairborne said.

"Harold Miller," he said. Ruth, his wife, sat in the chair and continued to stare at him. Clairborne moved still farther away. Groff, in the manner of a man who is seeing a ghost but is determined not to run, moved closer to him. "What is my name?" Groff said.

"Edward Huggins Groff," Miller told him. "You are 37 years old. You are a bio-chemist doing research in gerontology. Married, two kids, ages five and three. Boy and a girl. Names are Robert and Alice." He laughed. The situation was perfectly clear to him and he could see the funny side of it.

Clairborne, Groff, and his wife needed more time to see the funny side. His wife moved her lips. "If you are Harold Miller, who is in room 713?" she said.

"I don't know," he answered. "Did you identify him as me?"

"I did."

"But how could you do that? Was his face bandaged?"

"His face was not bandaged. And you go in there and look at him and tell me how I could do anything else." The expression on his wife's face was strained. Even her footsteps sounded strained as she followed him down the hall to room 713.

Harold Miller went into the room. There was a bed, with a patient sitting up in it. He looked up as his visitor entered. Harold Miller looked at him. Miller got a nasty shock.

The patient was the spit and image of him. They were as alike as two peas in a pod, as alike as twin suckling pigs. Hair color, eye color, shape of face, shape of the nose were similar, hands, skin color, everything was alike. Perhaps they were not identical but they were so much alike that only the closest examination would reveal any difference between them.

"Hell on wheels!" Harold Miller

said. He saw now how his wife had been fooled. This man looked enough like him to fool his brother. But even if appearances had fooled his wife, the names should have been different. "Who—who are you?"

"Harold Miller," the patient answered. "Who are you?"

CHAPTER II

HAROLD MILLER felt shock shake him. The patient not only looked like him, the patient also had the same name. No wonder his wife had been fooled.

On the bed, the patient looked shocked too. He stared at Harold Miller as if he could not believe his own vision, then passed a hand in front of his eyes, and looked again. "Crimantely!" he gasped. "Who are you—one of my great-great-great-grandsons?"

"Great - great - great - grandsons! Yike!" Harold Miller said. He understood now how the eight-year old kid had felt when he had gone yiping for his mama. Automatically he stepped away, backing into Groff, Clairborne, and his wife, crowding into the door.

"What did I tell you?" his wife said. She was pale and was breathing heavily.

"He asked me if I was one of his great-great-great-grandsons!" Harold Miller said. Not even their resemblance and the fact that they had the same name had shocked him as much as this question. The words had popped out of the patient's mouth in shocked surprise. Men speaking like this usually speak the truth. But how could this patient be speaking the truth?

The room was silent. The patient stared at them. His mouth was open. The expression on his face said he wished he had kept it shut. He closed

it with a snap.

Harold Miller started to back up, to get out of this place. It was damned unsettling to run unexpectedly into a man who not only looked enough like you to be your twin brother but also had your name. Miller wanted to get away, to take time to think about this.

Ed Groff quietly closed the door. Groff was the kind who always went toward ghosts, discovering later that he should have run instead. Groff moved toward the bed. "Did you say great - great - great - grandsons?" he asked. The tone of his voice was calm and reasonable. The tone said he was asking a courteous question and he expected a courteous answer.

The patient seemed confused. He looked at Groff, looked again at Harold Miller, opened his mouth to speak, closed it again as if he had changed his mind. "Go away," he said. "This beats the hell out of me. Go clear away."

"But you did say great-great-great-grandsons," Ed Groff persisted. "I heard you."

Ed Groff was a digger. He never left a buried bone alone but always tried to dig it up.

If he had not been present, probably the whole situation would have been dropped. Harold Miller, feeling greatly confused, would have left the hospital. The patient, probably equally confused, would have left later.

"How can you have great-great-great-grandsons?" Ed Groff continued. "You don't look to be a day over thirty years old."

"Looks are sometimes deceiving," the patient answered. He still didn't have his mind on Ed Groff or on what he was saying but was concentrating his attention on Harold Miller.

"I know that looks are sometimes

deceiving," Ed Groff said, patiently. "How old are you?"

"Oh, hell, I've forgotten," the patient answered. "Something over nine-hundred years—" This time he realized instantly what he had said. A shocked expression appeared on his face. "Forget I ever said that. I'm nuts, I'm out of my mind. I got a lick on the head in that accident and my mind is still fuzzy."

"You don't talk as if your mind was fuzzy," Ed Groff said. "You talk as if you have been surprised into speaking the truth."

"Well—"

"How can you be over nine hundred years old?" Ed Groff continued.

"**WHY** IN the hell are you asking all these questions?" The patient was irritated and he was becoming more and more confused. "What are you, a reporter?" He waited for the answer to his question as if he was afraid of reporters.

"No," Groff answered. "I'm a bio-chemist. We are all bio-chemists, except Mrs. Miller."

"And what is a bio-chemist?"

"A bio-chemist is a chemist who studies the chemistry of living organisms, the cell and its products, the organ and its products. It is a study of living processes, the changes that take place in living bodies, it is a study of life itself."

"I see," the patient said. He seemed to consider problems of his own. His eyes went to Harold Miller and he nodded, as if he approved of what he saw, then his gaze came back to Ed Groff. "What difference does my age make to a bio-chemist?" He didn't sound friendly.

"Well—" Groff began. To answer this question properly would require a long explanation, which he was reluctant to give. The answer would also require a statement of the aims

and purposes of gerontology, and of the Foundation, which he was even more reluctant to give. The research of the Foundation was not exactly hush-hush but it was not front page stuff either, for obvious reasons. Men who worked for the Foundation were constantly cautioned to keep their mouth shut, not because the Foundation was a secret organization but because the research it was doing was more potent than an H bomb. Unwise publicity which hinted that the Foundation had solved the problem of old age might result in calamity. If the notion got abroad that they could make old people young again, the old people would come, first a few individuals asking for new life, then a trickle, then a stream, then a sudden flood pounding ceaselessly against the doors of the Foundation. If the Foundation could not make them young again, or could not give them a few additional years of life, the results would be heart-break, despair, and bitterness too deep to measure.

All of which was in Ed Groff's mind when he hesitated.

"I see," the patient said. "You want me to trust you, but you don't want to trust me."

"But—" Groff said.

"Go on, get out of here," the patient spoke.

"I'll answer your questions for you," Harold Miller said. "Your age might make a lot of difference to a bio-chemist. If you are actually as old as you said you were, you might be the most important man alive." Groff clucked warningly at him, he ignored the sound. "We're working on gerontology," he said. He began to tell the part bio-chemistry played in gerontology, the aim and the purpose of the Foundation's program. The patient listened with acute interest. Harold Miller spoke eagerly, there was eagerness in him, it showed

in his face and in the gestures of his hand, expressive symbols revealing the pressure in him.

Perhaps he was being naive, he did not know. No man could live nine hundred years. Science itself was not that old. The problem of old age could not have been solved before the science of chemistry itself had been invented, except in one way. Was this man a living representative of the one way the problem could have been solved? Had he actually lived before Newton had been born, before Roger Bacon had existed, before the scientific method itself had been discovered, before the tools for licking the problem had been invented or even thought of except in fairy stories?

Was it possible that this man had inadvertently revealed the truth about himself?

"We're working on the problem of old age," he finished. "If you are actually nine hundred years old, it may be that you can help us."

Only a pathetic disbelief in common sense made Harold Miller hope. Common sense said this man was deluded or was lying. But Harold Miller hoped anyhow.

"Were you telling the truth?" He waited for an answer.

ON THE bed the patient was quiet. From outside, from the street down below, came the distant muted hoot of an automobile horn. Over in the park on the other side of the street, Harold Miller was vaguely aware of movement, a ball game between teen-agers. To the right of the ball diamond was a golf course, with men driving from the first tee.

Although they did not know it, the drivers of the cars on the street, the kids playing ball, the men playing golf, were also waiting for this man to answer.

A trace of a grin appeared on the

patient's face. "I'm kind of proud of you, son," he said. "To hear this story from the lips of a man who must be one of my own grandsons was worth waiting nine hundred years for."

The hospital room became very quiet. In the hallway outside the room, rubber tires whispered as a hospital carriage went past. There was a distant muted rattle of tin pans. Ed Groff seemed to have stopped breathing. Ruth Miller stood with her back to the wall, her face white, her eyes going from her husband to the man on the bed.

"Then you were telling the truth?" Harold Miller whispered.

The patient nodded.

The story, as they eventually got it from him and pieced it all together, started back in the tenth century. He had been born in Dartmoor Forest, in Devonshire, near the peak of Yes Tor, in old England. He didn't have the name of Miller then, he got this name in 1086, when the compilers of the Domesday Book came to an English stream, found a mill there and asked the name of the miller. Harold was his name, he had no other and needed none. So he became Harold the Miller, later shortened to Harold Miller, and he got his name in the Domesday Book as the owner of eight cattle, eighteen swine, five hydes of land, and one water mill.

For the next five hundred years he had lived in England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. He had come to America in 1638, in the ship, *Rose*. The Pilgrims had just gotten themselves well settled down then. At different times, he had been a blacksmith, a coppersmith, a sailor, master of a whaling ship, and many times a farmer or a planter, as farmers were called then. He had taken pains never to become too rich and never to meddle in politics or religion.

"If you get too rich, people envy you," he explained. "If you go in heavily for politics or religion, they notice you too much."

His existence had always been tied up with the problem of not being noticed, of not attracting attention to him. He had spent much of his life on the fringes of the settlements, moving into the backwoods of Virginia, over the Appalachians into Kentucky when that land was known as the *Dark and Bloody Ground*. He had been a '49er.

"Found a little gold, but not much," he said. "I didn't look for much."

"But where do I come into this story?" young Harold Miller questioned. "You said I must be one of your great-great-grandsons? Is that right?"

"It must be," the patient answered. "We look so much alike that we must have a common ancestry somewhere. It is my guess that so far as physical appearance goes, you have thrown back to me. I don't think there is much doubt that you are a grandson of mine, though I'm not certain how many *greats* are involved. I think you throw back to the brood I fathered shortly after I landed in this country. I was using the name of Miller then—"

Each generation he changed his name and his occupation. He also moved to a new state or a new country and started all over again, moving far away from the home he had had before. Sometimes he had married, and had raised a family. But this had produced problems. His wife grew old and he didn't. His children grew up. They did not inherit his ageless quality and the time came, or would come, if he let it, when his children looked older than he was. When he saw this time, coming, there was only one thing he could do—disappear.

"I always left my family as well fixed financially as I could and drifted out of the picture. In a few years, they decided I was dead and forgot about me."

"Wasn't that kind of hard on your wife and family?" Ruth Miller asked.

"Maybe, maybe not. When the kids were grown, they didn't need me. And my wives, well when they grew old, we sort of drifted apart." His voice sounded sad, as if he hadn't liked this part of life.

"But if you had used the name of Harold Miller once, how did you happen to use it again?" Ed Groff questioned. Clairborne stood silent and stiff, taking no part in the questions.

"Thinking back, the only solution I can see is that I just forgot I had used the name in this country," the patient answered. "When you have had so many names, it's kind of hard to remember all of them. I didn't realize what I had done until you came through the door of this room." He looked at Harold Miller.

"The minute you came in, I knew I had made a mistake, I had used the same name twice and I had also run straight into one of my own grandsons."

There was a coherence about the story, a relevance of detail that gave it an unquestioned air of authenticity. Ed Groff was nodding. Even he had ceased trying to pick holes in the story. As for Harold Miller, he had long since accepted as simple fact the story of this man.

He had met his great-great-grandfather, a man who was over nine hundred years old.

Standing against the wall, Clairborne cleared his throat and spoke for the first time.

"How have you kept from growing old?"

CHAPTER III

"I DON'T know the answer to that," the patient said. "I've puzzled about it some and had to give it up. I'm no chemist. All I know is that my heart beat is much slower than the average, about forty to the minute instead of the average seventy. There's something inside of me that keeps me from growing old, but I don't know what it is."

"What about diseases?" Ed Groff questioned.

The patient snorted. "I've had 'em all, cholera, small pox, and the black plague. Typhus and diphtheria and pneumonia and flu. But whatever it is in me that keeps me from growing old also keeps me from becoming very sick. Typhus lasted two days, small pox one. Cholera was the worst, it tied me up for almost a week. I guess I'm immune to most diseases now, I've had 'em all."

"Then you don't do anything to keep from growing old." Harold Miller spoke.

"Not a thing," the answer came. "I had a long babyhood and a delayed childhood. I didn't really mature, wasn't really a man until I was almost forty years old. Whatever it is that keeps me from growing old, I was born with it."

"Then you are actually a biological mutation," Harold Miller said. This was the one way in which the problem could have been solved before the days of science, and then it could not have been solved by men but by nature. Nature, as a result of an accidental combination of genes, could produce an individual that aged slower than the average. This was the solution Miller had had in his mind when he first realized that the patient might be telling the truth. It probably could not happen oftener than once in a billion births, but it *could*

happen this way.

Could man discover what nature had done, could the human mind penetrate the secrets of natural processes? All of scientific endeavor was based on the belief that nature's secrets could be discovered.

Harold Miller started to speak, changed his mind. The question was so important he did not know whether or not he wanted to ask it. "Will—?" For a moment he hesitated, then blurted out the words. "Will you help us, will you let us examine you, will you let us try to find out why you don't grow old?"

"I do grow old," the patient corrected. "For every thirty years that an average man ages, I age about one year, as near as I can figure it."

"But—"

"I've gone this far, I might as well go the whole way," the patient answered. "Yes, I'll help you, if I can. But I will have to impose one restriction."

"Anything you say," Harold Miller said. He was too excited to think clearly. Here they had in their hands the one man on earth who might be able to solve their research problems for them. A careful, competent examination of this patient might reveal one of nature's most closely held secrets. "What is the restriction?"

"That you keep secret the truth about me. That you tell no one—and I mean *no one*—what I am."

"Of course," they answered in unison.

"Then I'll help you," the patient said.

THEY TOOK him out of the hospital that afternoon, over the protest of a young doctor who was worried about the slow heart beat and wanted to do something about it. He waved aside the young medico's fears. Harold and Ruth Miller took him home with them. Since he and Harold

resembled each other so closely, and since the names were the same, they decided to introduce him to their friends and to the personnel at the Foundation as a cousin. He would not let them tell the people at the Foundation who he was and what he was. "A man in my shoes learns to keep his secret," he explained. "No publicity. Nobody in on this secret but the ones who already know it." His tone suggested that in his opinion perhaps too many people already knew his secret.

He was installed in the guest room at the Miller's home. Ruth Miller found his presence raised a rather perturbing problem. "I ought to make you chew Sen-Sens," she said to her husband.

"Why?" he asked.

"So I can tell you two apart in the dark," she answered.

"Oh, he wouldn't do anything like that."

"How do you know he wouldn't? He's a man, isn't he?" Her manner said that a man might be capable of almost any action.

For the first time, Harold Miller realized that from her viewpoint the situation might not be quite so ideal. "We'll have a password," he decided. "Something like Jack Frost. You say, 'Jack', and if I don't say 'Frost', don't let me into the bedroom."

"What if he learns the password?"

"We'll change it if he does."

"Change it when? After?"

"You're making a mountain out of a molehill. This man is important. Be reasonable."

"It's important for me to know who is sleeping with me too," Ruth answered.

Her fears proved to be groundless. Old Harold, among many other things, was a gentleman. Moving in with them, he seemed to feel he had found a happy home. Young Harold realized

that this man was incredibly lonely.

In the bio-chemistry lab at the Foundation, they began their tests. Queer birds were always wandering in and through the Foundation building. Old Harold was accepted by the rest of the staff as just another of this species. He cooperated completely and willingly. He was not only lonely but for the first time in his life, he had found people he could talk to, people who understood him, people who didn't laugh at him. Groff wanted to take notes on what he said, he could offer evidence on many of the disputed points in history, he had been there. Clairborne scoffed at the idea.

"We're making history. To hell with what has already happened." Clairborne, a little man with a pinched face, but a competent bio-chemist, seemed to be laboring under a suppression. "Just think, if we can lick this, we can make millions out of it. Billions!" His eyes narrowed at the thought and he shut up quickly.

"If we are going into this with the idea of making money, you will have to count me out," Old Harold said.

"Why?" Clairborne challenged. "Money is important." His manner said that in his opinion money was about the most important thing that existed.

"Sure, enough of it to get along on is important," Old Harold answered. "But I've seen too many men ruin their lives by getting greedy to be hoggish about money, or to want more than just enough."

"That's the way I feel about it," Young Harold spoke. "We're not working for money here, we're working for the whole human race. If we can perfect the process of slowing the onset of age, it must be made available to all people, regardless of race, color, or creed."

"You're a couple of sentimental idealists," Clairborne answered.

"I would rather be remembered with gratitude by one man than to have a million dollars," Old Harold said. "I'm not helping you in order to get rich. I could have gotten rich a hundred times over, if I had wanted to."

He was emphatic on the point. Clairborne said nothing more.

THE WORK began, and continued.

The four of them formed a tight group. They were part of a much larger team working at the Foundation, much of which was financed by a man by the name of Morganstahl. Morganstahl paid them a visit. He came into the bio-chem lab unannounced but accompanied by Dr. Claxton, research director. Young Harold looked up from the microscope in which he was studying a blood sample to see the two men standing in the doorway. Old Harold was sitting down. They had just taken another blood sample from him for analysis, they did this so often that he had begun to complain they ought to put a zipper on his arm so they could open the vein easier. Clairborne and Groff were working with the centrifuge.

"We've got visitors," Old Harold said, from his chair. His voice was quiet but it contained a warning note as if he had seen and had not liked these visitors.

Morganstahl stood just inside the doorway. He was about sixty-five years old, his face was beginning to show gray blotches marking the real onset of old age, he wore dark glasses and he walked with a cane. He was worth more millions of dollars than he could count—oil was the source of it, rumors from his past indicated that he had not cared how he got his money, just so he got it. During the last few years he had acquired a reputation for philanthropy. **MORGANSTAHL GIVES ANOTHER MILION TO CHARITY**, the newspaper

headlines often reported. If critics sometimes whispered that his gifts were actually conscience money, to the general public he had come to be regarded as a big-hearted philanthropist.

He donated immense sums to the Foundation and he paid them regular visits. Since they were spending his money, he always claimed he had a right to make certain it was spent wisely. His eyes focused on old Harold.

"Danby!" he said. His face whitened.

For a split second Old Harold hesitated. "Danby?" He rolled the word around his tongue. "Never heard of anybody by that name."

Morganstahl continued to stare at him. "I never forget a face."

"You must be mistaken, sir," the director said. "This is Harold Miller, cousin of our Harold Miller. You will note the strong family resemblance they have to each other."

"I note it," Morganstahl said. "I also note the strong resemblance this man has to George Danby." A hoarse note had crept into his voice and on his forehead a vein was throbbing visibly.

Old Harold was nonchalance itself. "When did you know this Danby?" he questioned.

"Forty years ago. We were young men together," Morganstahl answered. He poked out with the cane, jabbed Old Harold in the knee with it. "You look like him. I think you are Danby." Again he poked with the cane as if he was trying to satisfy himself that a real man was sitting in the chair.

Old Harold moved his knee. A trace of color appeared on his face. "Poke that cane somewhere else," he said. An edged note crept into his voice.

PERHAPS Morganstahl did not like the edged tone in Old Harold's

voice. Perhaps he did not like to let anybody tell him what to do or what not to do. Perhaps he had no concern whatsoever for the feelings of anyone except himself. At any rate, he kept poking. The pokes were not painful but they were annoying. Old Harold moved his legs again.

"Are you Danby?" Poke, went the cane.

"How much did you steal from him?" Old Harold spoke.

The pokes stopped. Watching, Harold Miller thought that Morganstahl was going to have a stroke of apoplexy. His hands began to shake and his face started to turn red. Claxton, the director, didn't look much better than the millionaire, with his mouth hanging open and his eyes bulging out. The bio-chem lab got very quiet. The centrifuge hummed softly. There was no other sound.

"I beg your pardon!" Morganstahl spoke.

"It's probably the first time in your life that you ever begged anybody's pardon for having poor manners," Old Harold spoke.

"I did not come here to be insulted!" Morganstahl said. His voice sounded like a buzz saw hitting a knot in a log.

"I didn't come here to be poked by a cane either," Old Harold said.

"Gentlemen—" the director begged.

"If you're calling him a gentleman, then include me out of that classification," Old Harold said, looking at Morganstahl.

"I beg your pardon—"

"Twice in one morning. This really sets a record," Old Harold spoke.

Dramatically, Morganstahl pointed his cane at Old Harold. "Fire this man!" All his life he had solved problems like this by firing somebody. If a clerk didn't serve him fast enough—fire the scum! If a book-keeper made a mistake—fire him. Old Harold had

spoken disrespectfully to him. Fire him!

"Yes, sir," the director said. He was almost out of his mind. If he wasn't treated right, Morganstahl might withdraw his support of the Foundation.

"Kind of hard to fire me," Old Harold spoke.

"Why?" Morganstahl demanded.

"I've never been hired. I'm donating my time and myself. What are you donating—money?" From Old Harold's tone and manner, Morganstahl and all his millions didn't matter a spit in the street to him.

Morganstahl looked like he was about to choke. "Who do you think you're talking to?"

"Hell, I know who I'm talking to—the biggest unhung thief alive," Old Harold answered. Bitterness crept into his voice. "I know you—I mean, I've seen your picture in the papers often enough to recognize you if I met you in hell."

"This is slander. This is actionable. I will instruct my attorneys—"

"To sue me for defamation of character?" Old Harold inquired. "Go ahead. Before they can show I have defamed your character, your lawyers will first have to prove you have a character to be defamed. From what I have heard about you, even the shy-sters you employ will have their hands full trying to prove your character is worth a tinker's damn."

The agitated director managed to get Morganstahl out of the lab. He went vowing vengeance.

An awed silence remained behind him. "You shouldn't have treated him like that," Young Harold protested mildly. Actually, deep in his heart, he had heartily applauded every word Old Harold had said. "But, we need his money."

"Sure, I know. Because I insulted him he will threaten to cut his donation to the Foundation. But he won't

cut it off. Do you know why?"

"No."

"Because he isn't giving his money away, he is spending it in the hope that you people will find some way to make him young again. He's trying to buy life with his money."

"You seem to know a lot about him," Clairborne spoke.

"Some few things, none of them good."

"How do you know so much about him?"

Old Harold grunted tonelessly. "He wasn't wrong when he thought he recognized me. I was actually George Danby once. How do I know about him? Because, forty years ago, I was in the oil business with him. He sold me out, he ruined me. That's how I know about him." For a moment anger showed on his face, then it faded. "Well, what does it matter now? He got the money which was what he wanted. And a lot of good it did him. I don't begrudge him a cent of it." He broke off as the door opened.

Claxton, the director, appeared. His face was red and he was puffing as if he was out of breath. "Fellows, I try to be a good guy. I try to keep everybody happy. We need money to run the Foundation, we've got to have it, lots of it. While I admit that I despise Morganstahl as much as you do—he's pompous, over-bearing, and tyrannical—still the fact remains that we need him. Under the circumstances there is little excuse for deliberate bad manners." His eyes came to rest on Old Harold. "I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to ask you to leave. No arguments, please." Lifting his hand and shaking his head, he gently closed the door behind him.

CHAPTER IV

"**H**ES A GOOD GUY," Old Harold said. "He hates to give me the boot but he's got to do it.

Well, I had it coming, I spoke out of turn."

"But we need you, we can't let you go, we've got to have you," Clairborne, Groff, and Young Harold spoke almost in the same breath.

Old Harold grinned. "I didn't say I was quitting, did I? All I have to do is stay away from the lab. And in order to protect you, son, I had better move to a hotel. This way you can see me daily and nobody can kick about it. You can ask all the questions you want and you can tap me for blood, take X-rays of me, examine me in any way you wish. It takes more than Morganstahl to lick us Harold Millers," He grinned at them.

That afternoon he moved out of the guest room at the home of Harold Miller and into a small hotel. The next day the bio-chemistry lab continued operations as usual. In the middle of the afternoon the director entered again. If he had been worried before, he looked frantic now. "Mr. Morganstahl is in my office," he said.

"Tell him to go soak his head," Ed Groff said. "What's bothering him now? We followed orders, we got rid of the man he didn't like."

"I'm afraid it is much more serious than that," the director said. "Mr. Morganstahl is convinced that your cousin is actually somebody that he calls George Danby, whom he knew years ago." He looked at Miller questioningly.

"Well?" Miller answered. Because of Old Harold's firm request, they had not taken the director into their confidence. Nor could they do it now, without breaking faith with Old Harold.

The director wet his lips. "I'm afraid you don't see the problem. He thinks your cousin is this George Danby. Danby ought to be an old man. But he isn't. So Morganstahl has reached the logical conclusion that we

have treated Danby and that we have discovered a method of making a man young again."

In the silence that followed, Groff spoke slowly. "Tell him he's crazy."

"Did you ever try to tell a man worth forty million dollars something he doesn't want to believe?" the director asked. "He *wants* to believe your cousin is George Danby. If this is true, then it is also true that we have discovered a way to make a man young again. Morganstahl wants to believe this more than he wants anything else on earth."

"Tell him very politely that he is mistaken," Harold Miller said. "Tell him that if we succeed, he will be the very first one to know about it."

"I have told him that," the director answered. "He isn't satisfied. He is firmly convinced that your cousin is this George Danby. He is so certain of himself that he has begun to shake me, to raise questions in my mind." Claxton's eyes came down to Harold Miller. "Morganstahl claims we are holding out on him. I happen to know that this is nonsense. *I* am not holding out on him. But are *you* holding out on me?"

"Eh?" At the lab bench, Miller uttered a single grunt, then was silent. Neither Groff nor Clairborne spoke.

"Just who is this man that you introduced to me as your cousin?" the director continued.

"Well—"

MILLER'S face must have given him away. The director said: "So you are holding out on me!"

"I didn't say that."

"Maybe your lips didn't, but your face did. What's going on here, Miller? I have a right to know."

"I can't tell you," Harold Miller answered.

"I have a right to know," the director spoke. He didn't shout, blus-

ter, or wave his arms. He didn't threaten and he didn't coax. He just stated the facts, calmly and gently. Harold Miller squirmed. This was harder to take than any amount of bluster. "I would tell you if I could. Something is going on, in fact, I would say we are closer to our goal than we have ever been."

"What?"

Miller nodded.

"What have you got?"

"The secret is not mine to tell. But this I promise you, if we succeed, the first person we tell will be you."

"By God!" There was a glow in the director's eyes. "Do you mean you have actually come close to licking this problem?"

"Not yet, but I think we will. We've just begun, just started."

"And this man, your cousin, has a part in it?"

"Yes."

"But you can't tell me what it is?"

"No."

From his face, it was obvious that the director was taking this decision hard. "All right," he said slowly. "I will respect your right to secrecy, but—" A gleam appeared in his eyes. The door slammed behind him and he was gone.

"Now we're in a spot," Clairborne said sullenly. "He'll fire the whole bunch of us."

"I don't think so."

Ten minutes later, the door opened again and the director entered. He was breathing hard and he was taking his coat off as he came into the room. He reached for a white lab jacket hanging from a hook on the wall. "I don't know what you boys have or what you're doing but I'm declaring myself in on it."

"What?"

He nodded his head vigorously. "Somebody else can handle the front office from now on. Or it can go un-

handled. I'm coming back to doing research, I'm moving in with you. I will take any oath of secrecy that you require of me. I will keep your secret no matter what it is or what it may require of me, but I've been in this work for years, and nobody is going to keep me from being in at the kill."

He spoke like a man who knew exactly what he was saying and meant every word he said. The three stared at him in incredulous disbelief.

"What about Morganstahl?" Harold Miller questioned.

"To hell with Morganstahl. I just kicked him out the front door."

Round-eyed the three bio-chemists looked at him. "Do you mean that literally?" Miller questioned. "Did you actually kick him in the behind?"

"I almost broke my foot on his tail end. Don't look at me like three old maids pecking into a pool hall. Secretly, for years I've been wanting to kick Morganstahl in the hind end. I finally did it. Brief me, boys, tell me what you've got. I'm working right here in the lab with you from now on."

They spent the rest of the afternoon telling him what he wanted to know. The wondering director listened, alternately nodding, then shaking his head. "It's inconceivable. Yet it could have happened like you say. As a matter of fact, if our work is to have any real meaning, it must have happened to somebody. Chance alone would produce a mutation, a man who aged very slowly. But for us to find such a man to use for research is almost too good to be true."

He was a changed man. "We'll want this man Harold Miller, or George Danby, whichever is his proper name, back in here tomorrow morning to continue with these tests you boys have started."

"But what about Morganstahl?"

"To hell with him. He can stick

his money—I mean he can take his money and—I mean to the devil with him." The director grinned. "Get Harold Miller back in here the first thing in the morning. He is more important than all the Morganstahls on earth."

Young Harold called Old Harold on the phone, to give him the good news. "Fine," Old Harold said. "Pick me up first thing in the morning. I'll be waiting in the lobby for you."

THE NEXT morning, he called at the hotel. Old Harold was not waiting in the lobby. Ringing the room, he got no answer. Vaguely alarmed but not quite knowing why, he got the desk clerk and they went up to the room. The bed had not been slept in.

Old Harold was not there.

The clerk knew nothing about him and no message had been left. Young Harold drove quickly to the Foundation lab, hoping that Old Harold would be there. Perhaps he had risen early and had walked to the lab.

He wasn't there.

"Maybe he—uh—found himself a girl friend," Clairborne suggested.

They waited all morning for him, all of them growing more and more worried. The day passed. They didn't hear from him. They kept calling his hotel without response. The next morning he still had not returned. The hotel had not seen him and knew nothing about him.

Young Harold went to the police, to the Department of Missing Persons. He got scant comfort there. An unimpressed sergeant took down a description of the missing man, noted that he was not wanted for any crime, and said that the police would do their best. Young Harold wondered how many times in the past some department of missing persons had looked, indifferently, for Harold Miller. And had not found him. It struck him that

Old Harold must be an expert at dropping out of sight, at hiding and at staying hidden.

"So far as you know, he left of his own free will?" the sergeant questioned.

"Yes."

"Is he a relative of yours?"

"A cousin."

"Any money involved?"

"No."

The sergeant shrugged. "We'll put it on file."

Had Old Harold left of his own free will? Leaving the police station, Young Harold wondered about this. The old man had seemed eager and willing to help them. He knew how important their research was. Under the circumstances, it did not seem reasonable that he would have quit cold, walking out without even telling them he was leaving.

"But from his own story, he was in the habit of leaving without telling even his closest friends," Clairborne said, back at the lab. "And another thing, there's a lot about him he hasn't told. He may be one jump ahead of the law. Actually we don't know anything about him except what he has told us. For all we know he may be a murderer in hiding."

"I don't believe it," Young Harold said hotly. "He wasn't a killer, he was an honest man, if I ever saw one."

"How many really honest men have you ever seen?" Clairborne questioned acidly.

"I don't believe he's hiding and I don't believe he is in trouble with the law," Young Harold said. "I think he's in trouble of some kind, and it's up to us to help him."

"First, we've got to find him," Clairborne said. "I've got a hunch that finding him will take some doing."

In this respect at least, Clairborne

turned out to be a good prophet. A week passed. Old Harold not only did not come back but they heard nothing from him. Young Harold found himself growing more jumpy each passing day as he waited for the ring of a phone that did not ring, as he looked for a telegram or a letter that did not come. The director was going quietly crazy. Each day, Young Harold went back to the hotel, hoping against hope that each time he would find a message. There was no message. The luggage had been left behind. He searched it carefully, finding nothing. Old Harold's car, badly damaged in the auto accident in which he had been hurt, had been repaired. The garage that had done the work called to find out where it was to be delivered. Old Harold hadn't taken his car, then. He hadn't taken his clothes. What had happened to him?

Had Morganstahl had him kidnapped? The second the idea occurred to Young Harold, he had a hunch he was on the trail of something. So far as he knew, Morganstahl was the only man on earth who might have a motive for kidnapping the man. Morganstahl, thinking Old Harold was George Danby, might have had him kidnapped, in order to learn from him the secret of the process by which he had been made young.

Ordinarily, millionaires do not take chances on violating the law, but Morganstahl considered he was a law unto himself. There was no doubt that he desperately wanted life and that he would be willing to pay for it.

COMING out of the hotel in the late afternoon, Young Harold did not notice the two men fall into step beside him.

"Mr. Miller?" one of them spoke. He was short and powerful, with heavy shoulders and long arms. He had his blue coat off and carried it

over his arm. His shirt was white, it was dingy and open at the collar, revealing short chest hairs trying to climb upward. The man's face was round and heavy.

"Yeah," Young Harold said, without really noticing the man who had spoken. Vaguely he was aware another man was on his left side, keeping in step with him.

The one on the left was slender and waspish. He walked daintily, as if he was about to step on an egg and wanted to be careful to put each foot in exactly the right spot. He had his coat on. Looking straight ahead, he was darting side glances at Miller out of the corner of his eyes.

"You want something?" Harold Miller said.

"Yeah," the man on his right answered. "We want you to take a little ride." He made jabbing motions with the coat held over his right arm. Where the coat formed a fold, the round hard muzzle of a gun was visible.

"Just take it easy," Blue Coat said. "Just don't get excited. A man wants to talk to you...."

At the sight of the gun, a wave of cold passed over Miller. "Who—who are you? What do you want?"

"Just take it easy, I said. A man wants to talk to you. Just do as you're told and you won't get hurt. Act funny and you'll get a bullet in the guts."

They put him in the back seat of an inconspicuous sedan. The man who walked daintily drove the car. He drove as daintily as he walked, taking great care to observe all traffic rules. Blue Coat sat in the back seat beside Miller. Keeping the coat over his arm and the muzzle of the gun out of sight, he chewed on an unlit cigar.

"But what do you want with me? I can't pay a ransom? I haven't any money. I haven't anything."

"A man wants to talk to you," Blue Coat repeated monotonously.

To Miller, this kidnapping made no sense whatsoever. He had no enemies and he certainly had no money. His wife might be able to scrape up a couple of thousand dollars, as ransom, but that would be the absolute limit. What did they want with him? Who were they? Who was this man who wanted to talk to him?

Dusk came softly and quietly. The car seemed to be moving aimlessly, the men seemed to be waiting for something. Miller eyed the streets, keeping close watch on their movements. They were making a mistake in letting him see too much. Dusk faded into darkness. The street lights came on. "Okay?" the driver called.

Blue Coat grunted an assent. The car pulled swiftly into a side street and was tooled slowly along. "I'm going to put a blinder on you," Blue Coat's voice came.

"A what?"

"A blindfold."

"But—"

"I can knock you on the head, if you say the word," Blue Coat's voice became blunt. "Make up your mind which way you want it, with or without a knock on the head."

"Okay," Miller said. He was helpless and he knew it. The car was a two-door sedan. To get out of it at all, it was necessary to push the seat forward. If he tried to get out, Blue Coat would certainly club him with the gun. If he tried to slug the man, he might get a bullet for his trouble. He submitted to the blindfold. After that, they seemed to drive for hours. He lost all sense of direction.

All he could tell for sure about their destination was that they had left the city. When the car finally stopped, he could hear frogs croaking in a pond somewhere near. Holding to

his arm, they guided him through a door, and into a place that was damp and musty. Voices echoed hollowly here. Then they passed through another door and the blindfold was removed.

He was in a small room. A single bulb set behind a metal grill in the ceiling shed a wan glow downward. The walls and floor were concrete. A cot was in the corner of the room.

"Set down and take it easy," Blue Coat said. "The man who wants to see you will be here in a few minutes."

They went out. As the door closed behind them, he saw that it was made of metal. He heard a clank from the other side as a heavy bar was dropped into place.

He was a prisoner, in a small room that looked as if it had been designed for storage.

CHAPTER V

THE METAL bar rasped and the door opened. Miller looked up.

The man who entered was well but not flashily dressed. Miller knew hundreds like him, rather dull looking but clean and neat. Professors, research men, chemists, physicists, lawyers who didn't get many cases to try, doctors who didn't get many patients. This man had black hair and prominent ears. Miller could tell this much about him. But no more.

A thin rubber Hallowe'en mask had been slipped over his face, giving him the features of a grinning gnome.

Gnome Face said: "Don't be startled by the mask. I don't wish to be identified by more possible witnesses than are necessary."

"I don't blame you," Miller said. "Kidnapping is a serious offense, especially if the FBI gets in on it."

"The FBI won't get in on this one," Gnome Face answered. "Nor

will any other law-enforcement agency. On the contrary, I think you will agree that you came here of your own free will." He made it as a minor point that wasn't really important.

"What makes you think I will agree that I came here of my own free will?"

"A hundred thousand dollars," Gnome Face answered.

"A hundred thou—" Miller would probably never earn this much money in his whole life. "Just for saying I came here of my own free will?"

"For that and for co-operating."

"Um. Whose throat do I help you cut?"

"Nobody's throat," Gnome Face said hastily. "Nobody will be hurt, especially not you." He was most emphatic on this point.

"What do you want me to do?" Miller said.

"I want you to reveal the process by which you regained your youth," Gnome Face said calmly.

"What?" Miller said, not so calmly.

"The process used to make you young again," Gnome Face repeated.

"But—" This made high order nonsense to Miller. He didn't get it. Then he got it. Or thought he did. "Who do you think I am?"

"I know who you are—George Danby, alias Harold Miller," Gnome Face answered.

"Uh." Harold Miller said. He started to laugh. What had happened was quite clear, too clear maybe. "You've got the wrong man."

"What's that you say?" the rubber mask writhed with alarm.

"There are two Harold Millers. We look so much alike it even fools my wife. You jackasses made a mistake, you got the wrong man. You can tell Morganstahl that he ought to be a little more careful about selecting thugs who can kidnap the right man."

"What?" Gnome Face said, as if he

wasn't hearing correctly.

Miller repeated what he had said. Gnome Face got it this time. For a moment he seemed shaken, then he regained his composure. "Who did you say?" A cold note crept into his voice.

"Whoever is back of you," Miller said. He had the impression that he was now the jackass, that he was the one who had made a mistake.

OBVIOUSLY Morganstahl had to be back of these men. Probably the millionaire was completely removed legally and physically from the kidnapping but he was the only person rich enough to sluff off a hundred thousand dollars in return for the co-operation of a prisoner. Also, he was the one person with this much money who knew for sure that Old Harold and George Danby were one and the same man. Groff, Clairborne, and Claxton knew it, but they were automatically eliminated from suspicion by the amount of money Gnome Face was offering. Morganstahl had to be back of this kidnapping.

Gnome Face studied him. The eyes were hidden by the mask and Miller could not tell their color or the expression in them. "You had *better* be George Danby," Gnome Face spoke at last. "I would hate to think we have made a mistake."

"But even if I was Danby, so what?"

"So what? So you could tell me what I want to know."

"Do you think you could understand it?"

"If you mean the technical details might be beyond my comprehension, forget it. I am a competent bio-chemist and I can understand any explanation you can give."

"I see," Miller said. So this was the way it was. He did not doubt that

the man was telling the truth. "You seem to have an excellent grasp of the situation."

"The whole matter has been carefully explained to me."

"And what are you getting out of it?"

"A hundred thousand dollars in gold deposited in a bank in Tangier in my name. This amount is already there, whether I fail or succeed. My passport is in order. If I succeed, four hundred thousand additional dollars in gold will be deposited for me."

"But gold is illegal."

"In this country, yes, but not in Tangier."

Tangier, Miller knew, was an international settlement on the northern coast of Africa, a sort of no-man's land, a place of refuge for international swindlers, political refugees so hot no country would take them, and for other law violators of the western world.

"You seem to have planned well," he said.

"I had help."

"Would you mind telling me where I am?"

"Not at all. You are in a deserted factory outside the city. We have fitted it up as a bio-chemical lab."

"You have moved fast."

"Money in large amounts will buy almost anything, including speed."

"And life?"

"And life. Also life's opposite—death." The voice grew harder, colder. "Are you willing to co-operate?"

"But what if I am not George Danby, as you think?"

"Then we will have to get Danby."

"But what about me in that case?"

Gnome Face shrugged. "What to do with you will not be my decision." The twist of his shoulders said he suspected what the decision would be.

"You can spend the night making up your mind. I'll see you in the morning and you can give me your decision."

The door closed behind him, the bar rattling as it was dropped into its slot. Miller wiped sweat from his face and fumbled in his pockets for a package of cigarettes. Gnome Face was working for Morganstahl. This much was obvious. It was also obvious that Morganstahl had had nothing to do with the disappearance of Old Harold.

Which left unanswered the question of what had actually happened to him.

MILLER could not see where the answer to this question made much difference to him. He was in a bad enough spot himself without worrying about the troubles of somebody else. "I guess I had better be George Danby," he decided.

As long as Gnome Face thought he had Danby, he would not start looking for the real man. In the meantime, Miller thought he could stall Gnome Face for days, maybe for weeks. Surely, in this length of time, he would find a chance to escape.

"I'll go along with you," Miller said, when Gnome Face returned in the morning.

"Good." They started promptly. First, questions. Gnome Face brought a chair into the cell, he provided cigarettes, poised himself with a notebook and a pen. The door was closed, the bar was dropped in place from the outside. Blue Suit or somebody else was on guard out there.

"First, how long does the treatment take to begin to be effective?"

"It produces results immediately, that is, within two weeks."

"How long does the complete treatment take?"

"That depends on how far you want to go. As near as we can cal-

culate it, for each week of treatment about one year of age is taken off. If the treatment lasts thirty weeks, the patient ends up thirty years younger."

"That seems pretty fast," Gnome Face said doubtfully.

"It is fast, to the patient. You understand, there are profound physiological changes taking place. The arteries are regaining their pliability, circulation is improving. The hair is beginning to grow again, the bones are losing their brittleness. The liver, the kidneys, the lungs, and the heart begin to renew their proper functions. In fact, every cell in the body undergoes a deep-seated change. The patient must be hospitalized. Nurses and doctors must be in constant attendance. The patient's diet must be regulated, increased input of vitamins must be arranged. His heart action must be watched, sometimes the heart just stops under this treatment. A doctor must be on hand to meet such emergencies."

"I quite well understand. Doctors will be provided."

"These are just the physiological changes. The psychological changes are even more pronounced and more important. A seventy-year old man who finds himself going back to become a mere thirty years old is due for a tremendous mental upheaval. A complete treatment team is necessary and must be in attendance at all times, doctor, nurse, psychologist, and psychiatrist."

"This sounds really expensive," Gnome Face said.

"It is expensive. Hundreds of dollars a day. Of course, it's worth the price. I don't imagine there is a seventy-year old man alive today who would not pay the cost, if he had the money. Of course, large-scale developments will reduce this cost to a more reasonable figure." Miller rattled off

the talk easily and readily. So far, he was on safe ground. The process of age reduction would work this way, once it was perfected. All these factors were involved. It was not a simple process, not a matter of taking a pill one night and waking up a young man in the morning, at least not the first time, although, once the proper age was reached, it might be possible to hold a man at the same age by the pill-at-night treatment.

GHOME FACE spent the whole day taking a case history. Sandwiches and coffee were brought in at noon, handed through the door, then the questioning went on.

"Tomorrow we will begin on the technical aspects of the treatment," Gnome Face said, when the day was over. He went out. The door was closed behind him.

The next day he began with technical details. After he had asked a dozen searching questions, Miller knew that Gnome Face was actually what he had pretended to be—a competent bio-chemist. Miller went much more carefully here, he didn't want to make a mistake. Much of the chemistry of the body has already been worked out. He gave standard formulas, told where they were to be modified, and why. Gnome Face wrote them carefully in his note book, then frowned.

"To check these formulae properly would take months," he said.

Miller was quiet. He had known that checking would not only require much time but that elaborate and expensive equipment would be needed, this was the reason why he had given the formulae in this manner.

"I wouldn't want to make a mistake," Gnome Face continued. "After all, this treatment must be used on a human being."

"Go down to Skid Row and catch

a bum and run the tests on him," Miller said.

"That's an idea, that's what I'll do," Gnome Face said, brightening.

"You don't mean it!" Miller said, appalled.

Gnome Face shrugged. "Why not? Somebody has to be a guinea pig, in case you're lying."

"But I didn't mean it, I was just kidding."

"I wasn't."

"But you can't make a guinea pig out of a human being without his consent!"

Behind the mask the eyes glinted at him. "Why not? We didn't have your consent when we brought you here, did we?"

On the third day Gnome Face laid down his pen. The words shot out:

"You're not George Danby!"

CHAPTER VI

"WHY NOT?" Miller demanded.

"Because Danby doesn't know any bio-chemistry and you know too damned much!" Gnome Face answered. "No, you're not Danby. You were telling the truth when the boys first brought you in."

Miller felt his mouth fall open. He saw the trap he had walked into, the trap of knowing too much about an extremely difficult subject. The questions had come so naturally and had been asked so casually that he had answered them without realizing the real George Danby didn't know enough about the subject to answer such questions.

"Well, I told you I wasn't Danby and you wouldn't believe me. So you just got what you asked for. Now what are you going to do?"

Gnome Face rose to his feet. "I'm going to find Danby."

"I mean what are you going to do

with me now?"

He got a shrug of the shoulders for an answer. "I don't know. Does it matter?" The eyes were expressionless holes, the mask an emotionless stretch of leering rubber. Gnome Face yelled for the door to be opened. The bar was removed, Blue Suit looked in. Gnome Face went out. The bar rattled as it was dropped again into place.

An hour later, the door opened again and Gnome Face entered. The door closed behind him, the bar rattling into place.

"Well?" Miller said.

"Whether you are Harold Miller or George Danby makes no real difference," Gnome Face said. "George Danby received the treatment. Harold Miller was one of the men who administered it. Probably Harold Miller knows more about the treatment process than George Danby. So, I am ready to start taking notes.

He was polite enough. He sat down and poised the pen over the notebook.

"What would you say if I told you there was no such treatment in existence yet?" Miller asked.

"Other people think it is in existence and I am taking my orders from them," the answer came. "I advise complete accuracy this time. Because I have found a guinea pig."

"Who?"

"You."

"Eh?"

"The necessary tests on the treatment process will be made on you," Gnome Face answered.

Miller's left arm jumped as his fist started automatically for the masked chin. He caught the motion and disguised it as a part of rising to his feet. "But there isn't any rejuvenation process yet. We were working on it but we hadn't solved it. The solution is years away yet. We've just begun!"

The words came from his lips in hard gusts of sound.

For all the impression he made on Gnome Face, he might as well have kept quiet.

"There isn't?"

"No." Sweat was on his face. Sweat was making his palms sticky. It seemed to him that sweat had replaced the blood in his veins.

The rubber mask stretched as Gnome Face opened his mouth to yell a single word: "Mack!"

In response the door opened quickly. Blue Suit, a gun in his hand, looked in. "What's wrong?" he said.

"Nothing, yet," Gnome Face answered. "I just want you in here." The expressionless eyes sought Harold Miller. "I don't know much about the methods of Torquemada, haven't had a chance to learn. However, I shall do the best I can, with my limited knowledge."

"Torquemada?" Miller faltered. He didn't like the sound of the word. Torquemada—had been famous in history for the use of torture. "Do you mean—?"

Gnome Face nodded. "I mean exactly that." He glanced at the impassive figure in the blue suit standing just inside the door. "Mack, when a guy won't talk, what would you recommend?"

BLUE SUIT rubbed a dirty hand on an unshaven chin. "Sometimes matches on the soles of their feet helps them to talk," he said.

"Do you really mean it?" Miller faltered. He was dazed, the idea of torture appalled him. Yet he knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that they would use torture on him in an effort to extract from him a secret that he did not possess, that nobody on earth possessed.

"I told you before I mean it,"

Gnome Face answered. "Just make up your mind which way you want it."

In the back of Miller's mind a vague thought formed, let go, formed again. Blue Coat, when he entered, had not closed the door. It stood six inches ajar. Miller laughed, a little shrilly. He carefully kept from looking at the door.

"You've got me," he said.

He hurled himself against the door, knocked it open with his flying body, caught it and shoved it shut again. Desperately he set his back against it.

"You had me!" he grunted. The bar was standing beside the door. He grabbed it. Vaguely from the room behind him came the sound of an explosion, a gun shot. The metal rang from the impact of the bullet, then jumped as Blue Coat drove his weight against it. Miller shoved with all his strength, holding the door closed. He got one end of the bar into its socket. The door thudded again as Blue Coat rammed himself against it. Miller's feet slipped. He caught himself, shoved again. The other end of the bar slid into place.

Like a mighty wave, exultation shot through him. He was out of the storage room and Gnome Face and Blue Suit were in it! Now to find his way out of this place, fast.

He was in a basement, this much was obvious from the thick concrete pillars stretching off into the distance. Dim ceiling bulbs cast a wan glow over the scene. Beside the iron door behind which he had been held prisoner was a cot with blankets, chairs, magazines, a worn deck of cards. Paper cartons that had once held food were scattered on the floor.

The iron door vibrated from the force of the blows being rained against it. To Miller, the sound was satisfying. He wondered how Blue Coat and Gnome Face felt at finding themselves caught in their own deadfall.

From the way they were pounding on the door, they didn't seem to like it. In this case, they would just have to lump it. A light burning far across the basement revealed a flight of steps leading upward. He moved swiftly in this direction.

Footsteps sounded up above. Miller heard them, flattened himself against the wall. Somebody was coming down the steps, in a hurry. At the bottom of the steps, he let out a single yell:

"Mack!"

The man was yelling for Blue Coat. His identity was obvious. He was the second of the duo who had kidnapped Miller, the one who had looked as if he was walking on eggs.

Egg Walker didn't see Harold Miller, crouched against the wall. He headed across the basement for the room with the iron door. If he reached this door, he would certainly release the two men held prisoner there. Miller went after him, low along the concrete, like a football tackler coming from behind to bring down a runner who has just broken into a clear field.

Egg Walker heard him coming, glanced over his shoulder, saw the body hurtling at him, tried to dodge. Miller hit a pair of twisting knees. They went down. Egg Walker had never played football, he didn't know how to fall. He went down with his head leading the way, his chin hitting the concrete. Miller heard a sharp pop of teeth snapping together. In his arms, Egg Walker squirmed. It was purposeless squirming, it was without intention. Egg Walker was just squirming a little because he was unconscious, knocked out cold by the driving tackle that had been thrown at him.

From under the man's shoulder, Miller took a flat automatic. The mechanism snicked as he pulled it back. A shell popped out, another was fed into the barrel from the magazine.

Miller hadn't known for sure whether or not there was a shell in the gun ready to be fired. Now he knew. He moved toward the steps, gun in hand, stopped again.

SOUNDS OF conflict were coming from up the stairs. Men were grunting up there, he caught the sound of moving feet. Then a man came down the stairs. Unlike Egg Walker, he came down a single step at a time—bump, bumpety-bump, bump, bump! End over end, falling, sprawling, the man came down the stairs. He fetched up with his body on the floor, his head on the last step. A little trickle of blood ran from the corner of his mouth. He was bald-headed and unmasked. Miller had never seen him before. The blood trickled from his mouth and formed a little pool on the steps.

Miller did not hear the second man come down the steps. He moved quietly, soundlessly down them. Miller caught just a flicker of a moving shadow. He stepped quickly behind a concrete post, the gun covering the steps.

The man was standing in the stairway surveying the basement. He was keeping out of sight. Just a part of his head was visible. Miller waited.

The man moved into full sight. Miller almost dropped the gun he was holding.

"Old Harold!" he yelled.

It was Old Harold who had thrown the man down the steps, then had come so cautiously after him.

At the sound of the voice, Old Harold turned and dived to the protection of the stairway. "It's me," Young Harold yelled. He moved to the stairway. The old man was coming down again. They stood facing each other.

Old Harold had a gun in his hand. There was a bruise on the side of his face, he had lost his hat, his hair

was frowsy and his coat was torn. He glanced once at his great-grandson, then looked quickly across the basement, seeking something or someone. His gaze came to rest on the body of Egg Walker. He grunted approvingly. "Your work?" he said.

"Yes."

"Good. There were two men upstairs. They're accounted for. How many more are there?"

"Two more. And they're accounted for."

"What happened to you, boy?"

"I was kidnapped, brought here. They were after you but they made a mistake and got me. They wanted the rejuvenation process." Swiftly he explained what had happened.

"Morganstahl!" Old Harold grunted.

"I figure he is back of it but I don't know for sure. What happened to you?"

For days this question had plagued him. What had happened to Old Harold?

"I was kidnapped too."

"What?"

Disgust sounded in the old man's voice. "I ought to have seen it coming, but I didn't. He just walked into my room with a gun in his paw and walked me out again."

"Who did it?"

"Clairborne," Old Harold said. His face was grim and hard.

"CLAIRBORNE!" Young Harold gasped. The statement bewildered him. He had known Clairborne for years and had thought him trustworthy.

"Nobody is trustworthy when they've got their nose into my secret," Old Harold said. "It was so big it addled Clairborne's wits. He knew if he could solve the problem of rejuvenation, he would automatically become one of the biggest men on

earth. He kidnapped me so he alone could solve the problem. He was going to organize a corporation and sell life. He held me prisoner in a farmhouse and was getting ready to start experimenting on me, just continuing the research of the Foundation." Disgust sounded in Old Harold's voice.

"What—what happened to him?"

"One night when he came to work on me, he ran into a little trouble. Somehow or other, his neck got broken in the fracas. I don't quite know how it happened...." His voice trailed off.

"You mean, you killed him?"

"Oh, no. It was an accident. Nobody with any sense ever admits anything except an accident. His body hasn't been found yet. Maybe it won't ever be found...." His tone changed. "When I got loose from him, I discovered you were missing. To my mind, this meant that Morganstahl had got you. I started hunting for you."

"How'd you find me?"

"It wasn't too hard. I just had Groff and Claxton make up a list of the best bio-chemists in the country. Then we cross-checked until we found one who had been hired, at a whopping big salary, by a lawyer who was retained by Morganstahl. Then we located this bio-chemist and I started trailing him. His name was Hendrickson....He led me here."

"Gnome Face," Young Harold said. "I don't know him but I know about him. He's over there with Blue Suit now."

"We'll leave them there, for the time being," Old Harold said. "Later, we'll call the cops and tell them where these two lads can be found. First, we'll get out of here. Then we'll call your wife. Then we'll call Groff and Claxton. I don't know who has been the most worried about you. We'll

let 'em know you're all right...."

"Then what?" Young Harold said.

"Then Groff and Claxton are going to pull out of the Foundation and we're all going into hiding, to work on the secret of rejuvenation." There was a glow in his eyes and a note of triumph in his voice. "Within five years we'll have that secret licked. Then we will make it available at cost to all the people of this earth...."

He was planning the future. Listening, Young Harold thought it was a good plan. In many ways it ran parallel to his own dreams.

"We have to go into hiding," Old Harold continued. "That's the only safe way for us, until we know the whole secret and are ready to announce it. If anybody is going to have life, everybody must have a chance at it."

"But what about Morganstahl? Are we going to have him arrested?"

"We're not going to touch him. He'll be paid off, but good, for what he tried to do here. We will just let him alone, let him grow older, day by day, until he dies, of old age and his own meanness, while we hunt for the secret of immortality!"

Again his voice went into silence. "How does all this sound to you?" he asked.

"It sounds fine, to me," Young Harold answered.

"Come on, then. It's time to be moving, time to be getting started."

Side by side they went up the steps together, son and great-great-grandfather. Somewhere ahead of them, perhaps near, perhaps far, was a new world in the making, a world without old age. Perhaps in some far-removed future, was a world without death itself, a world which they would help to create. Somewhere in the mind of each was a feeling of vast triumph.



To the good professor, the world was full of bloodthirsty creatures called women!

THE *Last Touch* OF VENUS

By Kendall Foster Crossen

The reason why the sight of a woman drove Dr. Gray to the point of insanity was simple: he knew where they came from!

THE WIND WHIPPED down Fifth Avenue, playfully tossing skirts. Martin Bradley stopped on the edge of the curb and grinned at a young man who was helping his girl into a taxi. He looked across the street and smiled at another young man and girl who held hands as they waited for the light to change. He was repaid by a wisp of perfume which had lately clung to a passing girl.

Dr. Gerald Gray was waiting in front of the Museum of Modern Art. Seven years had added a roundness to his shoulders, thinned out his white hair, and tightened the lines of bitterness in his face, so that Martin Bradley hardly recognized him.

"Thanks for coming, Martin," Dr. Gray said as they met on the sidewalk. His fingers trembled as he reached to shake hands. His hand-clasp was dry and hot. "I hope I haven't interfered with any plans."

"Of course not," Martin said warmly. "I did have a date with Alice—the girl I'm going to marry—but she understood."

"Did she?" Dr. Gray asked gently.

It seemed a rhetorical question, and Martin did not answer. It was true that she had tried to keep him from coming, but that had been only because she had not at first understood how fond he had been of Dr. Gray. But there was no point in explaining all of that.

He heard the click of high heels behind him and became aware that they were blocking the sidewalk. He attempted to move to one side, stumbled over a bit of raised concrete and crashed into the older man. The girl laughed softly at his embarrassment and passed. When he turned back, Dr. Gray's face was pale.

"I'm sorry," Martin said. "Did I hurt you?"

Dr. Gray shook his head. "It was the chain of events started by that girl," he said. "I suppose a psychiatrist would say I have a slight neurosis concerning women. Shall we go in?" As they started up the steps, the doctor continued: "I asked you to meet me here, thinking we could talk

in the Museum park. It's a quiet place. Then, later, we'll go to dinner at a little restaurant I remember on the West Side."

They walked through the cool silence of the Museum.

"How is Mrs. Gray?" Martin asked, as they turned toward the park.

"Mrs. Gray is dead," the doctor said. His voice was dry and brittle. "She died five years ago in Greece."

"I'm sorry," Martin murmured.

"In fact, she committed suicide..." Dr. Gray hesitated, then continued: "...in such a way that I was suspected of having murdered her. If I hadn't happened to have spent the entire day with a professor of languages at the University of Athens, I would have been arrested on the very eve of a great discovery. Fortunately, the professor of languages was above reproach—even if I were not."

NOT KNOWING what to say, Martin Bradley was silent as they stepped outside again and walked to one of the benches. The small trees in the park were greening with swollen buds, whispering with the gentle wind. Except for themselves, the park was empty.

"Martin," Dr. Gray said when they were seated on the bench, "you were always my favorite student. What has happened since your graduation?"

"Not much," Martin answered. "I spent two years working with Horace J. Addams on the excavation in Florida, then struck out on my own. I've just finished three years in Central America, and now I'm trying to write a book on Mayan civilization."

"Good, good," Gray approved. There were red spots of fever high on his cheek bones. "Still as interested in the Greeks as you were at the University?"

"As a matter of fact," Martin said,

"I have been planning to go there as soon as I finish the book on the Mayans. Why do you ask, Dr. Gray?"

"I've just returned from there. Seven years of field work. And I need your help."

"Mine? When you're the foremost authority in the field?"

"There might be some difference of opinion about that," the old man said dryly.

A little girl, playing along ahead of her mother, slid to a stop in front of their bench. She swung a large doll by its feet, but when that got no response, she spoke: "Hello."

Dr. Gray looked up just as the head of the doll flashed past his face. His features twisted with sudden emotion. "Go away," he said sharply. "Go!" It was almost a shout. He raised his right hand in a defensive gesture.

The little girl stared defiantly at him in a moment, then her face puckered, and the tears tumbled down her cheeks. She ran to her mother. The older woman glared down the path, then deliberately turned away, pulling her daughter after her.

Martin had watched in amazement. As though sensing his thoughts, Dr. Gray turned with an apologetic shrug of his shoulders. "Sorry," he said, "It's nerves, I guess. Still, I've learned that I have to be careful."

"Of a little girl?" Martin asked.

"Maybe," grunted the old man. He peered down the path, then turned back to Martin. "Do you remember the circumstances under which I was asked to resign from the University?"

"Not too much," Martin confessed. "I remember that it happened during my junior year and had something to do with an article you wrote. For a popular magazine, wasn't it?"

The old man nodded. "An article which I called 'The Emasculation Instinct in Women.' In it, I cited a

number of proof that women have slowly gained dominance over men; have moved into most of the teaching posts, particularly in dealing with the very young, and have infiltrated considerably into the mass communication medias. I showed that women are a predominant off-state factor in men going to war and killing each other. Proved that women have already acquired a bulk of wealth of the world, so that men are actually their slaves, killing themselves—their life-span already twenty years less than that of women—to further enrich the matriarchs."

"I remember," Martin said. He did remember and was embarrassed for the older man.

"Not only was I asked to resign from the University," continued Dr. Gray, "but my own colleagues laughed at me. Davidson—that cretin who still believes that the Piltdown skull and jawbone is that of a sheep—went so far as to claim I had become a woman hater because of sexual senility. Bah!"

IT WAS several minutes before the anger faded from the old man's face—minutes in which Martin Bradley felt guilty for wondering if Davidson was right. He forced the thought away as Dr. Gray continued.

"My article was based, in part, on a theory I'd stumbled across some time before. I have spent seven years searching for the proof of that theory—and I've found it."

"In Greece?"

"In Greece." Dr. Gray hesitated, looking down the path. Martin followed the direction of his gaze and saw three young girls approaching. They were dressed with a deliberate sloppiness, in scuffed saddle shoes, pleated skirts, and ill-fitting sweaters which still managed to draw attention to their breasts.

One of the girls seemed slightly older than the others. A burning cigarette hung limply from the scarlet slash of her mouth. She appraised Martin as they neared the bench, her ambling walk smoothing out with subtle self-consciousness. She took the cigarette from her mouth, held it a minute between thumb and second finger, then flipped it away without removing her gaze from Martin's left shoulder.

There was a startled cry from Dr. Gray. Turning quickly, Martin saw him beating at his coat, the red sparks flying. There was a stench of burning wool.

"I'm sorry," the girl said. The three girls walked on past the bench. When they were several yards down the path, the sound of subdued giggling floated back.

"Young arsonist!" Dr. Gray muttered, glaring after the three girls.

"I'm sure it was an accident," Martin said. He smiled at the older man's anger. "And all that happened was a few scorched threads."

"Because I've learned to be careful," snapped the old man. Slowly, the anger and fear faded from his face as his thoughts returned to their conversation. "Martin, do you realize how little we actually know about ancient Greece, in spite of all we have learned?"

"I remember you telling us in class that no one is even sure of the beginning of Greek history. I know that Sir Arthur Evans claims Greek history is forty-five hundred years old, but other guesses have run from three thousand to seven thousand years."

"Exactly, I hope you won't mind if I mention some of the other things we don't know about Greek history—since it does have a bearing on what I want to tell you. I'll try not to lecture."

MARTIN NODDED, feeling again the old excitement that had come in Gray's classes.

"We don't know," said the doctor, ticking the points off on his fingers, "from whom or from where the Greeks sprang. We know the bare facts of many of their important legends, such as that of the Amazons and of the floating island of Aeolus, without having any idea of the origin of these legends. We know that the early Greeks called themselves Hellenes and their country Hellas, but we don't know the origin of those names. We have discovered ancient writing in Greece, which we have thought to be either Mycenaean or Aegean, although it bears no relationship to any other language. But our best scholars have completely failed in all attempts to decipher these writings."

"There must be spots," Martin said eagerly, "completely untouched by any of the others. Evans, Schliemann, Dorpfield—"

"There are," Gray interrupted dryly. "I've found them. I've found the answers to all the things which I just mentioned."

"You have? Why, Dr. Gray, this will be the greatest thing since the discovery of the Pekin Man in China! Even greater!"

Dr. Gray nodded calmly. "Tell me, Martin, what do you think about the possibility of inter-planetary travel?"

To Martin, the change of subject was like a dash of cold water. Then, he realized that Dr. Gray must have done it deliberately to take the edge off his schoolboyish excitement. He relaxed and grinned.

"Depends on which kind you mean," he said. "If you're talking about our rocket experiments, I imagine that they'll be able to send a rocket to the moon within a few years. But if you're talking about the sort of inter-planetary travel which some

writer dreams up every so often, complete with an invasion of the Earth, then I think it makes good reading and that's all."

"What would you say," Dr. Gray asked, "if I told you that there was an inter-planetary invasion of the Earth seven thousand years ago?"

"Are you serious?" Martin asked. He was startled.

"Certainly," snapped the doctor. "There was an invasion. It has had a considerable influence upon our present civilization. And it has completely shaped our future."

"I don't get it," Martin said, shaking his head. "I've never known you to bring up a subject without a purpose, yet I don't see a connection between your leaving the University, your discoveries in Greece, and this—this theory about an inter-planetary invasion."

SECRETLY, he was wondering if the suicide of Mrs. Gray had affected her husband's mind. Or it might be old age. Martin remembered that his own grandfather had often gotten reality mixed up with things he read.

"It is not a theory," Dr. Gray said gently. "I can prove that a space ship from the planet Venus landed on Earth, near what was the Euxine Sea, seven thousand years ago."

Martin Bradley said nothing. He had decided that the least he could do was pay attention to the man who had once given him so much. He shifted his gaze to meet the doctor's faded blue eyes.

"I started a new excavation," Gray said, "in what was once known as Pontus. I found a wealth of art objects, which are being shipped back. I also found twelve large sheets of paper-thin platinum covered with the so-called Aegean script which has never been translated... before."

"You were able to break it down?" In spite of himself, Martin was in-

terested. If this were true, it would be of tremendous importance.

"Yes. I was successful because I approached it on the basis that it was a completely foreign language—foreign to the Earth. Everyone else had always tried to find a relationship with known languages. I won't go into details now, but after a year of steady work, I found the key to the script. The twelve sheets of writing were all the work of a woman who signed herself Hellene, First Princess of Venus, Commander of the Galactic Plan."

"Hellene?" Martin exclaimed in surprise. "The early Greeks called themselves Hellenes. . . ."

"That's right, Martin. Undoubtedly, it originally meant Hellene's people. Then, gradually the apostrophe was forgotten."

"But—but First Princess of Venus could mean that she served Venus, the goddess—"

"The goddess didn't come into existence until much later among the Romans," Gray said. "Remember that this was seven thousand years ago. Now—my discoveries were made on the spot which was once occupied, according to legend, by the Amazons. Remember what you learned in my classes about them?"

"I THINK so," Martin said uncertainly. "The Amazons were a group of women, ruled by a queen, who established a state in which no men were allowed. Once a year, the women went out on raiding parties and mated. Then, they returned to their own state. All male children born in the state were either killed or sent back to the fathers."

"That's about all there is. Remember the name of the Amazon capital?"

"I'm afraid not."

"It was Themiscyra," Dr. Gray said. "One sheet of platinum I found is a copy of a report sent to the Em-

press of Venus, who was named Themis. Cyra, I learned, is the Venusian word for city."

"You're sure of your translation?" Martin asked.

"Positive," Dr. Gray said with a smile. "I have a translation of that report with me. While I'm reading it to you, Martin, remember that the original is written on platinum—a metal which was probably unknown, and certainly not used, until the eighteenth century on Earth."

He pulled several sheets of paper from his coat pocket and spread them out on his knees. He glanced at Martin with a smile as though he knew the younger man's thoughts.

Then, he began to read: "To Themis, Empress of Venus and All Possessions Beyond Space—greetings. The exploratory ship, Themis I, made the trip through space with ease, arriving over the third planet from the sun within a few hours of the time calculated by the Royal Astronomer. Unfortunately, there was an error in our instrument readings, and we crashed in landing. Our Energy Converter was damaged in the crash, and Vaphio was killed. Since she was our only engineer, we will be unable to adequately repair the Converter.

"I have estimated that there is sufficient energy-drive in the tanks to send this one report via Space-Portation, to use the Memory Director on the entire crew, and to operate the Gene Frequency Modulator for a period of one Venusian year, as outlined under Plan C. Limitation to one year's use of the Modulator, will bring about certain changes in the final date of genetics supremacy. Taking into consideration the planetary atmosphere and the present development of the inhabitants, I have estimated this as follows:

" $\Delta q_1 = q_1 (\bar{w}_1 - \bar{w}_1) / \bar{w} \times (T_1 \times v_0) q_1$

"This means that we should be

able to make our first move for power, due to population control, by about the year 11,800 and to consolidate our moves by 11,850. Therefore, the Planning Board should fix the year 11,955 for the immigration.

"The people of this planet seem friendly. They are relatively primitive and simple, but our Wave Recorder shows that they are potentially intelligent. They are almost entirely undeveloped, except for minor advances in war instruments. Their social system is a strange one in which the males occupy the position of superiority and the females are treated almost as slaves. This in itself will indicate the primitive level on which these people exist.

"I kiss you, my dear sister, and weep that this must be my last communication to you. May you rule in health and bear many fine daughters. If my estimates are right, this planet will be ready just before the final deluge destroys our beloved Venus. Signed this First Day of the Landing. Hellene, First Princess of Venus, Commander of the Galactic Plan."

DURING the reading, Martin had been vaguely aware of the murmur of voices, sprinkled with light laughter. As Dr. Gray finished reading, the noise was louder, but Martin paid no attention. He was still lost in what he had heard. He was startled to see Dr. Gray suddenly leap to his feet, cramming the papers in his pocket.

"This was just a translation," Dr. Gray said, and it seemed to Martin that his voice was louder than before. "The original is in a safe place!"

As Martin looked up, he became aware that the Museum park was crowded with people. All of them women. He and the doctor were apparently the only two men in the park. Even so, no one was paying any attention to them. The women, rang-

ing from young to middle-age, were interested in their own affairs. They were sitting or standing all around the park and the conversations ran without interruption.

"Martin!" Dr. Gray was shaking him by the arm. "Come on! We must get out of here!"

He saw a flash of something like fear in Dr. Gray's eyes, then the old man had turned and was hurrying toward the Museum. Martin moved after him, his feelings a mixture of amusement and pity. Alice had been right, he thought. He shouldn't have come to meet Dr. Gray. Better to have remembered him as he had been in the University than the way he was now, so afraid of women that he apparently couldn't stand their presence.

Ahead of them, the path was congested with well-groomed, well-girdled women. There was a sleekness and sheen, a sameness about them that almost gave them the illusion of being an unbroken wall of twilight blue, and sable beige, stretching across the path. Then, as the old man reached them, the wall parted reluctantly, with no break in the rhythm of the humming voices. Martin Bradley plunged through after Dr. Gray. They reached the shelter of the Museum together.

Once there, Martin felt shame for having been infected even momentarily by the emotions of the older man. As though to cover his confusion, he turned to the guard who stood by the door.

"What's going on?" he asked, nodding toward the park.

"University Women's Club," the guard said. "They sure liven the place up, don't they?"

"Come on," Dr. Gray said gruffly to Martin. They walked through the cool rooms. "We'll get a taxi and go to the restaurant."

"Do you mind," Martin asked as they walked out to the street, "if we stop for a moment at one of the department stores on Fifth Avenue? I promised Alice I'd pick up some wool for her. She's knitting me a sweater."

"Not at all," Gray said.

A TAXI pulled to the curb and they got in. As Martin leaned forward to give the driver directions, he saw Dr. Gray brush at the seat with a quick gesture. Something metallic tinkled on the floor of the cab. Martin bent over to look. A bronzed bobby pin glinted from the floor.

"What's wrong?" Martin asked. "Did your Venusians use bobby pins as weapons?"

"What's a weapon?" Dr. Gray countered. "A knife can be used to carve objects of art out of wood—or to cut a throat. Water is essential to life—but it can also be used to bring death."

"Okay, okay," Martin said with a laugh. He put his hand on the older man's shoulder. "Seriously, Dr. Gray, why don't you see a psychiatrist? There are a lot of women in the world, and you can't go on getting upset every time you see one. You're letting this theory of yours get the best of you."

Dr. Gray gave him a curious glance. "We'll see," he said. "Or is this a polite way of telling me you don't want to hear any more about what I found?"

"No, no," Martin said hurriedly. As a matter of fact, he did want to hear more. He was strangely fascinated by it, despite his disbelief.

"I don't intend to read you all of the translations now," Gray said. "With one exception, the other records I found were notes, something like a diary which Hellene kept. From them, I was able to get a picture of what Venus was like at that time. It was a complete matriarchy in

which men served only as breeders and performers of menial tasks. Incidentally, all of the men had to wear collars of some white metal, apparently. She spoke of the white collars of slavery. The Venusians had practically no weapons of war, and war was forbidden under any circumstances. Their science even then was far more advanced than we even dream of now."

"If they lived in such a veritable paradise," Martin asked, "why did they bother sending a ship to the Earth?"

"I'm coming to that," Dr. Gray said calmly. "Our own astronomers have in recent years proved that it rains almost constantly on Venus. Hellene's notes bear this out. At the time of the invasion, the Venusian scientists had estimated that the constant battle against water was costing them slaves—which were all men—faster than they could be bred. They had concluded that the male population would be exhausted by the Venusian year 12,000. Thereafter, the race would either be drowned or would vanish for lack of breeders."

"Didn't they consider invasion an act of war?" Martin asked. He was unable to keep an edge of sarcasm out of his voice.

"No—as you will see later." Dr. Gray peered from the cab window. "But we are apparently at your department store."

MARTIN paid the cab driver and they stepped out. As they did so, a limousine pulled to a stop ahead of them. A young man leaped out of the front seat, ran around the car and opened the rear door. He helped an elderly woman from the car. She was complacently fat, her bulk encased in shimmering mink.

"Witness," Dr. Gray said softly in Martin's ear, "a more obvious form

of man's present slavery to woman. This young man also wears a white collar, no less tight for not being of metal."

"Wait a minute," Martin said. "Back at the Museum, you were frightened every time you saw a woman. Now you're being, what I suspect you consider, wittily sardonic. What's the idea?"

"If you were a trifle more observant," the old man said with a note of acidity, "you would have noticed there were definite reasons for my so-called fear. That first young woman caused you to practically knock me down, the sweet little girl almost brained me, while that young moronic female tried to set me on fire. What do you expect me to do—assist in my destruction?"

"What about insisting that we leave the park?" Martin asked.

"Mark it down to a dislike of crowds for the time being," snapped Gray. His tone indicated that he was through with the subject.

They entered the store and stepped into the elevator. Two women and a man were already in the car. Martin automatically removed his hat.

"Why not also pull on your forelock?" Dr. Gray's voice was no more than a whisper.

On the third floor, Dr. Gray stepped briskly from the elevator, but Martin stood to one side to let the women pass. As he followed them, he caught the gaze of Dr. Gray and flushed. He was immediately angry with himself for having any reaction.

They found the wool counter and waited patiently while the sales girl served two women who were before them, and one who arrived later but stepped in ahead of Martin.

After fumbling through his pockets, Martin finally found the slip of paper on which Alice had written the name of the wool yarn. He handed it

to the sales girl. When she gave him his package and change, the girl glanced at Martin's broad shoulders and smiled.

"This is a brand new shade," she said. "I guess you don't use it yourself, so I hope your wife will like it."

They moved in the direction of the elevator. "While slaves do not always recognize each other," Dr. Gray muttered, "they are always recognized by members of the master group." There was a smile on his face as Martin made no answer.

A SECOND taxi unloaded them in front of the small restaurant on the West Side. As they waited for change, Martin noticed the two women who came toward them along the sidewalk. They were both young matrons, well groomed, their faces enamelled perfection. One of them placed a cigarette in her mouth, pressed the plunger of a silver lighter. As they drew nearer, a blend of expensive perfumes arrived ahead of them. One of the women laughed in brittle amusement.

"But, darling," she said to the other woman, "you know how helpless men are about such things! You should handle it yourself and let George think he did it all by himself."

They passed into the restaurant. The blended scents reluctantly withdrew. A wisp of smoke lingered in the air, then dissolved as it drifted over the taxi.

It was early and the restaurant was still almost empty. Dr. Gray led the way to a table against the wall, away from the others that were occupied. They gave their order to a waitress, whose pencilled eyebrows expressed perpetual innocence, her red-lacquered nails perpetual defense. As she moved away, Dr. Gray pulled the crumpled papers from his pocket.

"Remember," he said, "that the re-

port I read mentioned a Plan C? One of the platinum sheets I found was a copy of Plan C. I have here a translation of that plan. Interested in hearing it?"

Martin nodded.

Dr. Gray kept his voice low as he read: "If for any reason, it becomes impossible for the Pioneer Group to use the Energy Mental Control on the inhabitants of the third planet from the sun, the following plan is to be set into action: Princess Hellene, after reporting to Empress Themis, will subject her entire crew to the Memory Director, erasing all memory of their home planet and the purpose of the interplanetary trip. She will then give the entire crew, including herself, repeated treatments under the Gene Frequency Modulator so that all children born of this and succeeding generations will possess the instinct to eventually bring about the domination of the planet through peaceful means. Depending on the number of treatments, all females on the planet should possess corrected genes within one hundred and fifty to three hundred generations following the Landing. Another three or four generations should then be enough to bring about the peaceful subjection of the males entirely through instinct.

"In the event that the present population of the planet is a primitive one, as our scientists believe, Princess Hellene is ordered to destroy all parts of her space ship and all instruments of science. Accidental possession of our science by the inhabitants might mean that they would be turned against the Pioneer Group, so that our glorious Venusian civilization would be forever doomed.

"Once this is accomplished, Princess Hellene will establish a nation, consisting only of herself and crew, in a convenient location. If the males

of the new planet are untrained in the proper relationship of the sexes, all males are to be excluded during the early years. In proper season, Princess Hellene will have her citizens anoint themselves with the ceremonial scents and will then lead them out on mating raids. Of the children born as a result of these raids, all males are to be either slain or banished to the outer territories. This separate nation must be maintained until the population is sufficient to send at least one female to every tribe on the planet. It is suggested to Princess Hellene that this nation be named after Amazona, our glorious first queen, and that the first female child born in the nation be named after our maternal grandmother, the Empress Hippolyte. Ordered and sealed by the hand of Themis, Empress of Venus and All Possessions Beyond Space, in the Year of Our Mother, four thousand, nine hundred and forty-nine."

THERE was silence when Dr. Gray had finished. Martin shook off the trance-like feeling and looked up to find the old man studying him with bright expectation.

"I must admit," Martin said, "that it makes an exciting story. I think I've got an idea about those sheets you found. We know that all arts, including story telling, were highly developed among the early Greeks. Maybe you've found an early fiction story—the first science-fiction story ever written."

"And the sheets of platinum?" Dr. Gray asked gently.

Martin hesitated. "Our records may be wrong. They may have known how to use platinum."

"Anything is better than acknowledging bondage to mothers, school teachers, wives and mistresses, is that it?" Dr. Gray asked. He waited until their waitress had seated a man and

two women at the table back of them. Then he continued, his voice lower: "According to the records, I believe the Venusian calendar to be exactly ten thousand years older than ours. This, in turn, makes a couple of dates in Hellene's report significant. Did you notice?"

"No," Martin said shortly. The implication that he was dominated by the women in his life still rankled.

"The report," continued Dr. Gray, "indicates that they expect all women on Earth to have the corrected genes by the year 11,800. The first move for domination is to come then, with such moves to be consolidated by 11,850. Subtract ten thousand years to get our calendar dates. This gives us 1800 and 1850. Our history shows that the first book on female suffrage, by Mary Wollenscraft, was published in 1792—just eight years earlier than the predicted date. And universal suffrage started about 1850. Now, since they predict that the Venusian immigration can take place in 11,955—that means in 1955, by our reckoning."

The waitress came with their food. She set the plates down with a careless thump. Martin tried to tell her that he wanted his coffee later, but she had already gone to wait on three women who had been seated at the next table. He turned back to Dr. Gray.

"What do you suggest we do about it?" he asked, with heavy humor.

"Nothing," snapped Dr. Gray. "I'm satisfied by the spreading of knowledge—and having it believed. Besides, we cannot, in five short years, undo the work of seven thousand years. Will you help me?"

"To do what?"

"Reveal the things I have discovered through a book or a series of short pieces."

"I haven't seen the proof yet. Re-

member, you said you had proof."

"You'll see the proof, if you agree to help," Gray said. "Although I must warn you that helping me may be dangerous. If you want to refuse, I'll understand."

MARTIN Bradley sat up straighter. "How do you mean—dangerous?"

"It's obvious," said Gray, "that the machine the Venusians called a Gene Frequency Modulator somehow changed those genes, inherited through the female line, so that all women on Earth today act instinctively for the success of the mass immigration to take place in 1955. In the same way, they instinctively react to anything which threatens it—such as the publication of the documents I found."

Martin was barely aware of the plump woman who brushed his arm getting to the table on the other side of them. "That sounds even more fantastic than the story itself," he said.

"Does it?" Dr. Gray asked. "While I was still in Greece, I was robbed twice. Once by a simple-minded youth who confessed his girl friend had pointed me out as a rich tourist; the second time by a young lady, of a wealthy family, who was in a complete daze afterward. Both times, the documents fortunately were in a safe place."

"Coincidence," muttered Martin.

"On the ship, returning," Dr. Gray continued, "I was carrying the documents on my person. Once, while walking on deck, an old lady slipped and fell overboard. In falling, she grabbed me and almost took me with her. And there was no fear in her face. Only a fanatical gleam, which changed to disappointment as her grasp on me slipped."

"I thought you said they were unaware of this instinct?"

"They are. But when the threat is

great enough, I'm sure the instinct rises almost to an obsession, so the emotional reactions are the same as if awareness existed. Now—knowing the danger—will you help me?"

Martin Bradley hesitated. All of his senses, his scientific training, told him that Dr. Gray was the victim of an overpowering hallucination, but the request had been put in such a way that he could hardly refuse. At the same time, even in humoring the old man, in the fascination the story held for him, he had a feeling of being disloyal to Alice.

"If you'll give me the original platinum sheets and all the evidence you have," he said slowly, "and if they, and the translation, will stand up under all tests—then I'll help."

"Good!"

"Where is this proof?" Martin asked.

"In a place where no one in the world, except myself, can ever find it," Dr. Gray said. "If you'd care to wait, I can get everything and be back here within a half hour. You can examine it while we're having coffee and brandy; take everything along with you afterward."

"I'll wait," Martin said. The quicker they could get it over with, the better, he thought.

DR. GRAY stood up. He looked down at Martin with a queer smile on his face. "There is another thing," he said, "which I find interesting, although it adds nothing to the proof. Tell me, Martin, what is it that practically all writers and poets have claimed is a woman's chief weapon?"

Martin thought a minute. "Tears?" he asked finally.

"Exactly," Dr. Gray said. His smile broadened. "And the chief thing we know about the planet Venus is that it has a super-abundance of water. It

seems somehow fitting that the descendants of the Venusians should find their chief weapon against men to be—water."

With that, he was gone. Martin Bradley leaned back in his chair, trying to encompass everything he had experienced that afternoon. He had meant to crystallize his doubts, marshal his arguments, but he was surprised to find that some time during the last hour he had begun to believe. He shook himself angrily and looked around the restaurant.

While they had talked, the restaurant had filled up. Martin found himself unconsciously taking note of the men in the room. There was one at the table back of where Dr. Gray had sat, another at a table in the center of the room, two more against the far wall. The rest were women. He was conscious that the smell of a hundred different perfumes was mingling with the hot odor of food. Even the smoke from the cigarette that he had just lit was scented and cloying. He ground it out on his plate.

He heard the meaningless babble of voices, became aware of crimsoned mouths gulping at food, of sharp white teeth tearing at the tissues of meat. He saw hundreds of forks, like silver extensions of the blood-red nails, stabbing at plates. And, suddenly, he was aware that his shoulder was pressing sharply against the wall. His breathing was uneven. He felt the room closing in on him, and his stomach knotted with fear.

He knew it was insane, but it was there. He threw money on the table and got up. He'd wait in the bar, he thought. There, it would be cool and quiet, with shaded lights. He walked hurriedly between the tables, not looking at any of the diners.

AS HE reached the front of the restaurant, he looked out. It was

already dark, the street lamps flooding the street with a strange yellow glow that made him feel better. As he looked, he saw a figure start across the street, walking with the green light. Then, down the street its headlights like staring eyes, swept a car. He heard a shrill screech of tires, the headlights wavered, then straightened up with a roar of the motor. The lone figure in the street was impaled by the shafts of light. Martin could feel his own muscles tensing, straining if they could impart their strength and will to leap to the man in the street. Then, even as the warning yell welled up in Martin's throat, the car struck. He saw the thud, rather than hearing it—almost felt the crunch within his own bones—saw the man tossed like a dangling doll into the air, watched it fall limply to the street. The release of his own breath was an agony.

In the street, the car seemed to hesitate, then leaped forward into the gloom between street lamps. Martin had a swift impression of the bright red convertible with top down, of the white tensed face back of the wheel, of light glinting on yellow hair. Then, as the twin tail-lights fled out of sight, he was released by his locked muscles. He ran toward the street.

There was a small crowd already gathered by the time he reached the corner. A policeman was kneeling beside the crumpled figure in the middle of the street. Martin knew what he would see. Knew it when he saw the wisp of white hair. But he bent over and stared into the stilled features of Dr. Gerald Gray.

"Here, you," the policeman growled, "get back!"

"But—but he's my friend..." Martin said. "I saw it happen. Is he hurt badly?"

"He's dead. You saw it happen?"

Martin nodded.

"Get the license number, maybe a description?"

"Not much," Martin said. "There wasn't time. It was a convertible—red—a bright red like nail polish. The driver was a woman. She had long blonde hair—"

"Wouldn't you know it?" demanded the policeman. "The way some of these women drive..."

But Martin Bradley didn't hear him. He was walking back toward the restaurant, peering into the shadows, shuddering as a wave of perfume stabbed across his face. The collar of his white shirt seemed unaccountably tighter.

MARTIAN DETAIL

By ROY ZUBER

MARS HAS been the subject of critical analyses for a long time and recently the subject of much observing through a variety of telescopes ranging from the two hundred inch to certain Schmidt types. More details are brought out as a result of this.

It is now firmly believed that the reddish color of Mars is due to the fact that its surface is composed of a red, rhyolitic igneous rock, unaffected by the thin atmosphere of the red planet. The arrangement of the dead sea bottoms and the desert areas is in perfect keeping with what we know of geological change here on Earth. As a heavy crusted planet cools and shrinks it tends to form a tetrahedron—though of course any deviation from spheroidal shape is barely detectable.

Certain miniature craters suspected of existing could be the result of meteoric bombardment, while the so-called canals might be actual cracks in the crust due to shrinkage. Color changes with the seasons are perfectly compatible with the tendency of lichens and other low-life plant forms to seek cracks and crevices for their growth.

It is generally agreed that while Mars may not be suitable for the support of life as we know it economically, it is certainly possible that it may have once known such life and it is not impossible that traces may remain. The canals are not complete illusions and as our science-fiction fan knows, they are unquestionably linked up in some way with the existence of life on the mysterious ruddy planet.

DESTINATION PERFECT!

By
CHARLES RECOUR

IT IS NOT the custom of *Amazing Stories* nor *Fantastic Adventures* to blurb any particular movies. Occasionally we've raved over an exceptional piece of fantasy. We want to encourage readers to share with us some of these exquisite pieces of work. Until now there has been no occasion at all to rave about the science fiction of the movies. Everything so far has been second or third rate, some incredible pot-boilers which we wouldn't want anyone to see.

"Destination Moon" is the film which every one with the slightest bit of interest in s-f must see! We viewed the initial blurbs rather skeptically. Typical Hollywood rave stuff, we thought. It can't be as good as they're hollering. But once having seen it, we've changed our minds. It's terrific! We won't go into details about it except to say that it is an adult, scientific treatment of what a trip to the Moon will inevitably be like when it happens.

Looked at as a film, *Destination Moon* naturally has some faults. For one thing, it has little story to it. But in light of what it is attempting from a technical standpoint, we'll accept it. There is no dramatic punch save in the miracle of going to the Moon.

The sets, the cartoon sequences, the costuming and above all, the technological aspects of the film are almost perfect. There are a few minor flaws, hardly noticeable, which we will mention. None of them involve the sequences with miniatures and puppets. These pieces of work are simply "out of this world."

In the beginning, ostensibly you are

seeing the take-off of what is to be the satellite rocket around the Earth. You also see its crash and failure. Actually what you are looking at is the take-off of a V-2 rocket from White Sands, New Mexico. Why this deception, we don't know. Certainly many viewers must have recognized the V-2's unmistakable profile and action.

A second trivial point is the fact that the space-suits hang rather loosely on the men as if they weren't under pressure and as if there wasn't a vacuum around them. This should have been easy to correct with a little air tank within the suit, or for that matter, with the external air tanks the men carried. Minor, but irritating, is our view.

Another, and a debatable point, this time, is the fact that the Lunar terrain is shown to be a solid cracked surface, much like a dried mud-bath. This is possible of course. But the common astronomical belief today is that the surface of the Moon is covered with a pumice-like dust. Never-the-less we can't really defend a criticism here.

In sum total however, *Destination Moon* is real science-fiction, incredibly accurate, with no anachronisms, with no obvious ridiculous faults which have characterized all s-f films to date. If some genius could have added an exciting, dramatic, storyline to this film, he would have satisfied the interests of those to whom technology is anathema. But for anyone interested even slightly in the sheer thrill of riding a rocket to the Moon, a ride aboard the "Luna" is sheer heaven. *Destination Moon* is really It—with a capital "I"!

ENERGY SINK...

By BERNARD LYTLE

DR. PAUL SHERRER, a Zurich physicist working in this country has come up with a startling concept whose validity cannot yet be evaluated, but which promises to have the astro-physicists bouncing around for quite a while. The assertion is that empty space is full of tremendous quantities of energy!

In the study of quantum theory (energy exists in packets equal to Heisenberg's constant times the frequency) a study of the concept called the "zero point level" requires that so-called "empty" space actually have enormous amounts of energy. According to the physicists' computations, ordinary interstellar space has an energy concentration of more than seven hundred million million kilowatt-hours per cubic foot!

We can't possibly visualize in what form this energy would appear, but it seems

feasible in light of the fact that no logical explanation has yet appeared to account for the tremendous blasts of cosmic radiation with which the Earth is bombarded. Is this energy-sink responsible perhaps?

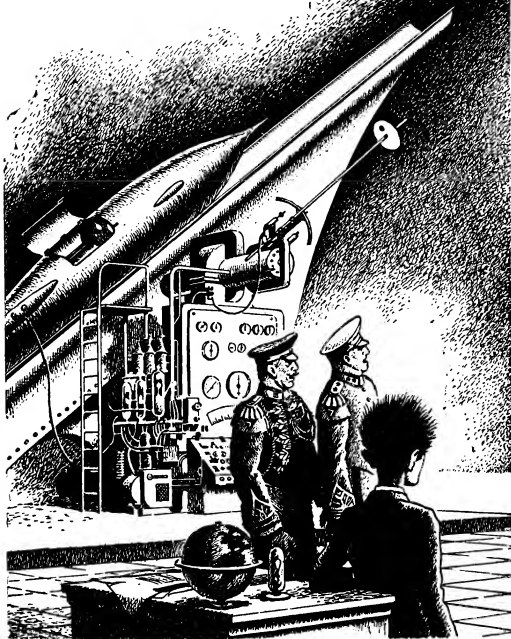
So far the drawback of the energy-sink theory is that such a tremendous quantity of energy would make itself felt by its gravitational effects alone. It has not done so. But that is no reason to rule it out. It is like trying to detect the energy in the oceans. Unless we have a suitable reference level and suitable instruments, we can't make it clear that actually, because of temperature, the oceans themselves are vast energy-sinks. Similarly, the energy-sink of empty space may require a reference level before it can be detected.

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ON SOME DISTANT STAR



"These robots," General Mast said, "form our secret weapon—and it cannot fail!"

By Charles Creighton

At Randy's fingertips lay the power to save humanity. It was up to him to decide if doing so was worth while . . .

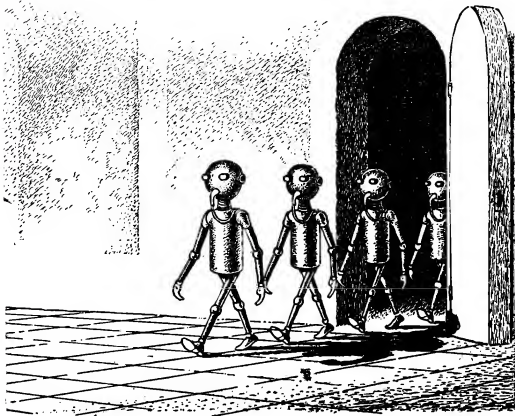
"THE PRESIDENT-Dictator himself is coming," Randy Hoke whispered.

"Shh," I told him. "You can get shot for saying that."

"No talking in ranks," General Mast snapped. "President-General Holbrenner will be here in a minute and I want you people to look as if you knew the fundamentals of mili-

tary discipline at least."

We knew the fundamentals, of course, the little things like saluting and clicking your heels and coming to attention. We practiced them, when ordered to do so. After General Mast snarled at us, the buzz in the ranks died down for a minute or two. Then it picked up again. "What's Holbrenner doing here at Project ABC?" I



whispered to Randy.

"He wants the honor of pushing the button that makes things go boom," he answered. "Didn't you know—this is the last D-day?"

I shrugged. I could remember at least five D-days. "On this day we launch the attack that brings the enemy to his knees and ends the war!" The first couple of times you hear those words rolling sonorously from a loud speaker, you can believe them, you get a kick out of them. That is what you want, that is what you want more than anything else on earth. But after the fourth or fifth D-day, you only shrug when a new one comes along.

Hope too long deferred in realization tends to turn into a shrug.

"I know we've been worked to death for the last couple of years but I never knew exactly why. Say, has this got anything to do with your private project?"

"Could be," Randy answered and was silent. Even he had enough discretion to keep quiet about the hush-hush job he was doing. Only a few technicians held constantly under guard knew the nature of that project. None of the rest of us knew. We were busy building rockets and atomic war-heads and microwave radio projectors and receivers, all of which were obviously part of Randy's project. But the heart, the core of it, only Randy and his technicians knew.

You don't know Randy, do you? Well, he wasn't much to look at. But he was it, just the same. When they passed out brains, Randy got two dipperfuls. When they passed out tolerance and understanding and compassion and understanding and warm human sympathy, he was on hand again with his dipper, getting more than his fair share. But when they passed out physical equipment, Randy was asleep in the corner. He had a

warped misshapen body, he wasn't five feet tall, his head was too big and his arms were too long, and his hair stood straight on end. No amount of hair oil ever made it lie down. A rumor going around said his parents had worked in an uranium separation plant but they tell that story about everybody who doesn't fit the herd pattern.

Randy Hoke was one reason the Americas had lasted as long as they had. Not that he had ever produced a super weapon to date—he hadn't. But he had dug up the basic discoveries that served as foundations upon which super weapons could be built. The freeze-weapon that had turned mile-square chunks of ocean water to ice had been his brain child. What you could do in the way of stopping shipping by freezing the waters of a sea port was something of a marvel.

That freeze weapon had been blurred as the end of war. Only, somehow, it hadn't been. Sure, we could stop shipping out of Brest and Liverpool and other ports, for the length of time the ice took to thaw, but we couldn't land men at these ports, to hold them. Wars end when your enemy is dead or when you have a knife at his throat. And not before.

BUT THAT is neither here nor there and I, Bill Jones, radio technician top grade, do not wish to write of it. I wish to write of the coming of President-General Holbrenner to the Top Top Top Top Secret Project ABC Laboratories, located in what had once been an important copper mine in the Rocky Mountains of western Montana. Every one of those *Tops* belongs where it is. Each is a reflection of the operation of the military mind and its passion for secrecy.

They tell me that in the old days military information was graded on three levels, restricted, confidential, and secret. The company cook, of course, soon knew everything in the restricted file, the mess officer was thoroughly familiar with the confidential drawer, whereas the secret file was known only to the commanding officer, the sergeant in charge, and the sergeant's wife. The motor pool got it from her, of course, and through the motor pool—

In order to correct this situation, the military mind invented Top Secret, after which the only possible solution was to add more tops, just as the only solution for general's itch is more stars. But no matter how many Tops were added, the sergeant's wife and the motor pool eventually had the information.

The European Federation had its motor pools too, which was probably the source of our knowledge of their Big Bertha, the big boom-boom that they were preparing for us. They could build D-day weapons too. And had, the grapevine said. I did not doubt that within one hour after the President-General arrived at Project ABC, the European high command would know where he was and what he was doing. Microwave radio in thumb nail size transmitters sending an impulse that bounces back to earth on the other side of the globe became commonplace long ago. Like D-days, microwave radio and motor pools work both ways across the pond.

The honor guard which General Mast had dug up and which lined both sides of the tunnel at the mine entrance, was a little ragged in its formation; some swayed a little as they stood at ease, some didn't have their shoes shined, and there was a couple of bayonets that had rust on them. But what can you expect after

a war has gone on for eighteen years? I know, back in 1950 the prophets thought the next war would not last longer than eighteen minutes, the length of time it took to atom bomb your enemy. So much for the prophets. I remember when the last elected president took office seven years ago in the new capital in Colorado, the third new capital the Federation had had. The old capital, Washington, went up in '83, the second year of the war. Holbrenner was not an elected president; he had seized power and was actually a dictator, though you could get shot for saying that.

The big steel door at the entrance swung open.

"Attenshun!" A sergeant yelled, at the top of his lungs. The honor guard stiffened, the scientists assembled in ranks came to attention. The President-General and one aide came marching in.

HOLBRENNER was a big man with a florid face and who-the-hell-are-you eyes. In the special uniform he had created for the commander-in-chief, he literally pawed the earth as he came into this mine.

Behind him came one man who looked like a smooth-faced college kid, except for the gun at his hip. Atwell the Butcher, they called this aide. A lot of people shuddered at just the thought of his smooth face. Atwell didn't look dangerous; he looked like a pink-faced college boy thinking up some new way to get a cow into the bell tower on Hallowe'en. But the motor pool said the butcher part of his name was well earned.

Acknowledging General Mast's salute, Holbrenner came straight to Randy Hoke. His eyes glowed with eagerness. "Ah, Professor, I understand you have something to show me?"

"Something, yes," Randy answered.

"Everything is ready for your inspection, sir," General Mast said.

"You have this control device which we have discussed?"

"We have it, sir," General Mast answered.

The control device was new to me. Apparently it was the gadget Randy had been working on in secret. Wondering what it was, I followed Holbrenner into the damp guts of this ancient mine. Our first stop was the control section. The push button was located here but Holbrenner was not ready to use it, yet.

In the control section we had a large special map which showed the whole world, including every important city in the European Federation, Paris, Berlin, Moscow, and a lot of smaller places that no one ever heard about but which some motor pool said were key points in the enemy's set-up. Manufacturing centers were indicated, experimental laboratories, fission plants. We had each marked with a red glow lamp as a danger spot. Beside each red bulb was a green light, waiting to be turned on.

All the red lights were burning now. After Holbrenner pushed his button, the red lights were supposed to go out and the green lights to come on.

With General Mast fussing around him and trying to answer each question before it was asked, Holbrenner inspected the control section.

"Now the rockets," he said at last.

They were ready too. The first one was already on the firing ramp, a long pointed tube of metal with a rocket blast and control vanes in the rear and an atomic warhead in the nose. We had twenty-eight others just like it, all in position to move on to the firing ramp at two minute intervals, the whole operation of firing all twenty-eight to be completed in just four minutes under one hour.

Everything about the rockets was

ready except the pilots. We had none. I had wondered who was going to guide these sky monsters but nobody had volunteered any information and I had had better sense than to ask. Asking questions around this place could get you a hole in the head mighty fast.

"They look like miniature space ships," Holbrenner said.

"Actually we took a developed space-ship design, a model that we were able to borrow from the old space ship design project, and modified it to meet our purpose here," General Mast explained.

"Will these things work, Hoke?" Holbrenner asked. He was twitchy and nervous. To him, this was getting close to his life's big moment.

Randy Hoke was calm in contrast. "We shot one at the moon, aiming at the crater of Copernicus, and hit the target."

"What about the twenty-eight vital points in Europe and Asia, will these rockets hit those targets?"

"They can't miss, sir," General Mast said hastily. "Professor Hoke has solved that problem for us."

IT HAD BEEN quite a problem too.

Building a rocket that would travel 10,000 miles had not been difficult. They could have built *that* rocket in 1950. The problem had been—control. You could sit in a copper mine in Montana and aim a rocket at Point X in the Ural Mountains and you might hit Point X. But the chances were you would hit the steppes or the Black Sea or your friends in Vienna. They had tried pre-aiming, they had tried radar in the nose of the rocket flashing back data to human operators who in turn would control the flight of the rocket. Not much luck. A rocket traveling thousands of miles an hour is simply moving too fast for human reactions. The operator needs

seconds to make up his mind and seconds are too long. They had also tried elaborate electronic controls similar to the computers that had been developed to aim and fire anti-aircraft batteries automatically but the factors that had to go into the computation had been too complex to permit an adequate solution of the problem.

Long-range rocketry remained about where it had always been, artillery that you could use to hit a continent or a country. It killed people, lots of people, but it didn't win wars.

However if a way could be found to pin-point these rockets to their target...

As I understood it, Randy had found a way.

"Show me the controls," Holbrenner said.

"Yes, sir," General Mast answered. He had saved this for the last because it was best. Because he had a lot of ham in him, he had arranged to dramatize it for the benefit of the President-General.

"Here they are, sir," Mast said. He made a sign to a lieutenant who had been standing at attention beside a closed door. The lieutenant saluted and opened the door.

A gasp went up over that whole vast room as the door opened. They came marching out in file, one by one, about three feet tall. Light gleamed back from the dull metal of their bodies, their arms swung in rhythm like well trained troops marching, the twin photoelectric cells that were their eyes glowed with a dull radiance.

They looked like an army of black dwarfs appearing on the scene.

Holbrenner took a step backward. Fright appeared on his face.

"Robots!" he gasped.

The robot idea, the electro-chemical computing brain that made them possible, was not new. Even the idea of robot armies had been advanced. But

it had failed in every case.

These robots were new. Nothing like them had ever been put together before. This was what a man like Randy Hoke could do to an old idea.

At the sight of the robots, Atwell pulled the gun at his hip. He fired a single shot. The bullet struck the first robot in the line, a glancing blow on one side of the chest. The robot swayed a little at the impact, balanced itself, and kept on coming.

It came to a halt in front of Holbrenner, saluted as smartly as any palace guardsman, left faced, and marched away.

"Hold it," Holbrenner shouted at Atwell.

The Butcher didn't shoot again. Near the door, the lieutenant there caught his stomach and went slowly to the floor. Atwell's shot, glancing from the robot, had found a target.

As the lieutenant went down, Atwell lifted his head and looked once, then forgot the matter. A dead man wasn't new enough in his life to justify a second look. A private slipped from the rear rank of the honor guard and carried the wounded officer away. We learned later that the lieutenant died.

"Wonderful, wonderful, wonderful," Holbrenner was saying.

THE ROBOTS, in perfect order, were clicking their heels in front of him, saluting, executing a left face and moving on to take their place in the file that was standing at attention near the rockets, awaiting orders there.

"How do you like them, sir?" General Mast inquired.

"They are magnificent!" Holbrenner answered.

Mast glowed. The expression on his face said he could already feel another star sprouting on his shoulders. Poor devil, he had only two.

"Will these robots guide the rockets to their targets?"

"Perfectly, sir," Mast answered. Maybe he would get *two* more stars!

"Professor Hoke, my congratulations," Holbrenner said.

"Thank you," Randy answered.

"Are the robot pilots ready to start now?" Holbrenner continued. "I might as well tell you, this is important. Secret reports from inside Europe indicate that somehow or other the Federation has ferreted out the nature of the research being carried on here. They are building the largest atom bomb ever assembled and have devised a new homing device, their purpose being to wipe out this whole project. We must go into action before they do."

The only sound in the vast room then was the click of robot heels.

General Mast saluted. "We are ready, sir," he said.

"These robots cannot disobey their orders, they cannot fail to pilot the rockets to their destination?"

"No, sir," General Mast said.

We stayed long enough to watch the first robot pilot take its place inside the rocket already on the firing ramp. It looked like a small black child scrambling into that dark interior. But it was a child who would not need air or water, it could go far beyond the atmosphere. If Randy Hoke said he could guide a rocket, I was willing to believe it.

Robot Number 1, the leader of a non-human Kamikaze squad.

After the rocket port had been shut, we went quickly to the control room. By remote control, the rockets would be fired from here.

On the big map the twenty-eight red lights gleamed.

Holbrenner pushed the button.

The answering roar of the rocket taking off thudded through the whole mountain. Seconds later the loudspeaker at the radio desk said.

"Robot Number 1 reporting. The

take-off was successful."

Randy hadn't told us these things could talk. The words came as a shock. Even Holbrenner looked surprised.

"Carry on," Randy said. He had taken up his position handling the microphone at the radio desk.

The roar of the second rocket shook the mountain. Down in the firing chamber, I could imagine sweating technicians wheeling those huge rockets into position. They had big cranes for the job. I could also imagine the robot taking its place at the special controls.

Robot Two reported by radio. And got its orders from Randy Hoke. "Carry on as ordered."

When the last rocket had thudded into the sky, every man in the big control chamber glued his eyes on the map where the red lights were shining. The plan, as explained by General Mast, was for all rockets to arrive simultaneously on their targets. Since the first rocket had left an hour before the last one, and since their targets were hundreds of miles apart, the plan was for the rockets, under the guidance of their robot pilots, to assemble in space. Then each would be aimed at its target by its pilot. Microwave radio carried in each rocket would turn off the red lights on the map, turn on the green ones.

We waited for word to come from the robots. It came.

"Robot One reporting. We are assembled in space as planned."

"Carry on as ordered," Randy Hoke said.

THERE WAS silence in the big room. Holbrenner looked like a kid with a new toy. "We'll smash every vital point at the same instant!" he exulted. "We'll blow them out of the ground wherever they are. The Federation will never recover from

this blow. General Mast, my congratulations on your planning."

Holbrenner was exulting. Atwell looked both pleased and sad—pleased at the thought of all the destruction on schedule to take place in a few minutes, sad as if now, with the Federation doomed, a job he had loved might be near its end. General Mast's face said he could already feel four more stars on his shoulders.

Five minutes passed. Holbrenner showed signs of becoming uneasy. "Surely it is time for the explosions to begin," he said.

"Just a little longer," Randy Hoke answered.

Two minutes passed. The speaker woke to life.

"Robot Number One reporting again. A matter of importance. We have just observed a very large rocket fired from Europe. We estimate the destination to be somewhere in your vicinity."

Holbrenner frowned. What was this? Nobody spoke. Randy's face started to get white. "Carry on," he said.

"But—" the voice came from the speaker.

"Carry on as ordered," Randy Hoke said, a growl in his voice.

"Hey, what if that rocket is the Big Bertha the Federation has been getting ready to shoot at us?" Atwell shouted.

The same idea had formed in my mind but I had dismissed it. Somebody was always shooting off an experimental rocket or so.

"Impossible," Randy said.

At the words Atwell spoke, Holbrenner's face had lost some of its ruddy color. Probably he had inside information on the nature and the destination of the Big Bertha the Federation was preparing.

"Are you sure that rocket isn't—?"

"Of course I'm sure," Randy an-

swered. "The robots have orders to report back on anything strange or unusual. To them, any other rocket is strange and unusual. They are not capable of forming proper evaluations in a matter such as this. They will report anything—"

He was making it smooth. He convinced me. Holbrenner looked convinced too.

The speaker awoke again. "We have verified the computation. This rocket from Europe is under definite control from its base. It will certainly land in your immediate vicinity—"

"Shut up," Randy said.

"But—" A pleading note crept into the mechanical voice.

"Are you on course and proceeding as ordered?" Randy spoke.

"Yes. But—"

"Then continue on it!" Randy ordered. He turned to the startled Holbrenner. "Everything is going as planned. If you will notice the board, in just a few minutes the lights will begin to go out." He nodded toward the big map.

"The board, the map, oh, yes, the map, of course."

The President-General turned his attention to the map.

"In just a few more minutes," Randy said.

"What course?" Atwell spoke.

RANDY DID not seem to hear him. "In just a few more minutes—" He sounded like a man who was asking for just a few more minutes of life, a man whose mind has been made up but who has faltered just a little in the time of crisis.

Atwell drew his gun. "What course?" he shouted.

For the first time, Randy seemed to become aware of him. "Do you doubt me?" he said.

"You're damned right I doubt you. This thing smells like a double-cross

to me. What course are those robots following?"

Randy flinched but did not falter again. "I'll have the robots themselves tell you if you doubt me." He picked up the mike, snapped the switch.

The speaker started instantly. "This is most important. You shut us off. We have been trying to reach you—"

"Repeat your general orders," Randy Hoke said.

"W—what?" the mechanical voice stuttered.

"Repeat your general orders," Randy answered. "Word for word, repeat the orders that have been built into you and which you cannot disobey."

"Very well." A resigned note seemed to creep into the robot voice. "These are our orders: To set a course for the nearest star and to examine it, for planets. If we find planets, we are to land on one of them, and there set up a civilization that will do what men have always wanted to do but have never succeeded in achieving. A civilization without war, without hunger, without disease—"

"I knew it!" Atwell screamed. "This is treason. Those rockets are not aimed at the Federation strong points; they are leaving earth!" He would have said. Randy Hoke shot then, but Holbrenner grabbed his arm.

"Hold it, Atwell."

Over their voices the robot words went on. "If the nearest stellar body does not have suitable planets, then on some distant star, we will find what we are seeking. There we will build—"

"Is this true, Professor Hoke?" Holbrenner shrilled, drowning out the words from the speaker.

Randy Hoke stood very straight and very proud. Even that misshapen body seemed to grow in stature now. "It seems I can't keep it from you any longer. What you have just heard is the truth." There was pride in his

voice and in his flashing eyes.

"I'll fix that," Holbrenner shouted. He hadn't become what he was without being able to think fast in an emergency. From Randy's hands he snatched the microphone. "This is the President-Dictator speaking," he shouted. In his stress, he forgot to say President-General, but spoke the truth instead. "I am your supreme commander. Your orders are cancelled. You will proceed immediately at full blast to the twenty-eight targets that have been selected—"

"Whose orders?" the speaker said.

"By order of your supreme commander!" Holbrenner shouted.

"Oh," the robot answered, in a tone of voice that was a shrug. "We take orders only from our master. And these are our orders: that on some far star we will build what men always wanted to build on earth, a civilization where no man need kill his brother, and there we will await man's coming—"

Holbrenner looked straight at Randy Hoke. "You are the only person they will obey?" he said.

"I am the only one," Randy said. "I made them that way. But—"

"Then order them back on their targets!" Holbrenner said. He motioned to Atwell, who brought up the gun.

"I anticipated this moment and this threat," Randy said. "The robots will not obey even me if I try to countermand their general orders. I made them that way. And as for you, sir, you can go to hell."

PROUD AND straight he stood as he said it, one little warped misshapen man defying the President-Dictator and his killer, defying also the whole Earth and all of man's history on it.

They should have shot him then, but they didn't. For one reason. From

the speaker the robot voice came again. "Master, one of us *must* disobey, in one small matter—"

"You carry out your orders!" Randy Hoke screamed.

"Yes, master. On some far star— But *one* of us. . ."

One of them must have disobeyed in one small particular. One must have deliberately gone off course. We had the report minutes later. "—Tremendous atomic explosion well beyond the atmosphere of earth—"

It was the Big Bertha of the Federation going boom-boom. Out in space.

One small robot must have turned back, must have disobeyed, must have accepted a collision course with that Big Bertha, must have destroyed that huge atom bomb, out there in space, by ramming it.

I wonder how the robots decided which one would ram that bomb and I wonder how the robot that was selected felt as it set its sights on that Big Bertha zooming upward through the heavens?

I wonder if a robot can feel proud before it dies?

From far space, the voice of the robot leader came back over the speaker, a whisper of sound growing weaker each minute.

"We will await your coming, master."

WELL, I guess perhaps in some future century they will come back. But if they come back tomorrow, they will not find Randy Hoke.

The personal body-guards of the President-General are hanging Randy Hoke in the morning.

For treason. They're hanging General Mast, and the rest of us, too, for the same reason. I feel a little sorry for the general. He won't get his stars. Atwell thinks we are a nest of traitors here at Project ABC. And perhaps we are.

I do not care what men like Atwell think. I like to imagine, now in these last moments as I write these words, twenty-seven robots in twenty-seven rockets winging outward into space, robots that will some day build somewhere in this universe the best of which the human race has dreamed.

They are taking with them the only thing worth while about us, our dreams of a better world and of a better day than the ones we know, taking them to completion somewhere.

What we could not build here, they can build—there.

The morning light is in the corridor. I hear the feet of the marching guards.

Randy Hoke grins at me and we arise and go.

A man, at least, can feel proud. . .

THE END

SALT VERSUS SHOCK

By WALT CRAIN

ONE OF THE major headaches of the commission concerned with defense against atomic bombings, is how and where to obtain the enormous amounts of medical supplies which will be undoubtedly necessary. Experts have estimated that tremendous quantities of blood plasma and whole blood will be required to treat the hundreds of thousands of shock and burn casualties that any atomic bombing is inevitably bound to produce.

Some authorities have estimated that a single bomb would cause enough casualties to require a million quarts of blood plasma! Obviously it will be impracticable

to obtain this much material much less store it and make it available. As a result medical authorities are studying the shock problem in great detail.

They have come up with a partial solution. Ordinary salt water, mixed with some sodium bicarbonate will do the trick. One level teaspoon of table salt along with a half teaspoonful of sodium bicarbonate, mixed in a quart of water, will do wonders toward alleviating the blood disturbing effects of burn and shock. This solution, so easily prepared will be the major liquid intake of any victims of atomic bombing.



The CLUB HOUSE

Where science fiction fan clubs get together.

WELL, HERE I am again, a stack of fanzines to be reviewed in front of me, my wife mad at me.

"I have a little problem," she said as we were driving down to the Mammoth Caves in Kentucky. "It took me several years to solve it. A couple of college professors I gave it to couldn't get it. Let's see what you can do."

It was a nice problem. Given: the lengths of the bisectors of two of the three angles of a triangle are equal. To prove: the triangle is isosceles. (The length of a bisector is the distance from its point of intersection with the side to the point where it reaches the common point of intersection of the other two sides, forming the two bisected angles or something.)

In a few days I had proved to Mari that she hadn't really solved it. Meanwhile, we had seen the Mammoth Caves and the horse country around Lexington and had gone on to Cincinnati and rented a tourist cabin. I kept working on the problem, and after two weeks I found the solution.

Of course the honeymoon was shot, but I had the answer to one of the simplest problems—you try it—in trigonometry. The way she was given the problem, it was during her teens, and she was pestering an artist who was trying to paint a landscape near her house in Laguna, California. He found she was interested in math and gave her the problem. From then on he painted in peace.

* * *

And now a letter from Charles Lee Riddle:

Dear Rog:

I have been intending to write you since you quoted part of my letter to you in the August *Amazing*. You quoted me as saying I thought you were snobbish—which was correct—but why did you not quote me also as saying I thought you were one of the best writers in the field today, or something like that?

You also stated that you had reviewed PEON before. Quite right, Rog, but that was October 1948—and as an old joke goes, "What have you done for me re-

cently?" PEON has been appearing rather regularly for the past two years since you reviewed the first issues, and up to four months or so ago was sent to you every time, but nary a word in the CLUB HOUSE.

Perhaps I was a bit hasty in writing that letter to you, but imagine yourself in my position. Here it was in Hawaii, a hot sultry afternoon, the new *Amazing* on hand, and no review. Something snapped inside, and the next thing I knew I wrote you that letter.

To bring you up to date on material in PEON, I am enclosing the last three issues... And you'll receive future issues. I would certainly appreciate a review on your part of at least the latest issue. This will be sent upon request of any reader (and I won't even ask for postage), and also future issues.

Sincerely yours,
Lee

The reason for giving away issues of PEON is that Lee's in the navy, and in the navy he isn't allowed to conduct a side business. If he makes even a penny profit it's a business; if he loses money it's a hobby. So you have your choice of sending a dollar for nine issues or writing a letter asking for one copy free. And when you get that copy you can write again and ask for another, and so on. But send your request airmail, as airmail goes to Hawaii overnight while ordinary mail takes six or seven days.

Now let's see what the three copies Lee sent me for review look like...

PEON: 9 issues for \$1.00 or one free on request by mail; Charles Lee Riddle, PN1, USN, Fleet All Weather Training Unit, Pacific, c/o Fleet Post Office, San Francisco, California. The May, July, and October issues are 46, 26, and 28 pages respectively of high quality mimeography. John Grossman has one of the cover illos, and Dougherty has the other two.

In three installments in the three issues Anthony Boucher has a Fantasy Opera checklist, published partly for your information and partly to give you a chance to add to it if you know of any, such operas he hasn't listed.

Under the department heading "Menehune Mutterings" Roy Cummings writes where there are several sf fans. "The

Annals of Aardvark" by Aaron Aardark, III, is another department. It takes apart current stf literature and authors. I won't go into it except to say that it's the most intelligently written of such departments I've seen so far.

In addition to these regular departments in each issue there's a nice selection of short fantasies and articles. "Fiction for the Scientist" by Donald Baker Moore in the July issue of PEON does a better job of discussing the differences between fantasy and science fiction than anything I've seen yet.

There are roughly twenty-six fanzines for review this time besides a S.A.P.S. mailing. That's a lotta fanzines. Too many for adequate reviews. Most of them have something about the Norwescon in them, either first hand or second hand reports, and mostly saying the same things. It was a very successful convention. Let's hope the one next fall at New Orleans will be as successful. By the way, the C-invention Memory Book can still be had by sending a dollar to Don Ford, 129 Maple Ave., Sharonville, Ohio. I don't know if the Norwescon Committee plans on publishing a Norwescon Memory book. Haven't heard that they will, anyway.

* * *

FANTASY-TIMES: twice a month; 10c; 12/\$1.00; James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd Ave., Flushing, N.Y.. Fandom's leading newsmagazine, bringing the latest happenings as soon as they happen, thanks to its being issued twice a month.

Want to know when some non-stf magazine publishes a stf yarn? F-T will tell you in "Cosmic Reporter", a regular feature by Arthur Jean Cox...

* * *

QUANDRY: No. 4; 10c; I'm in a quandry. The editor doesn't give his name anywhere in the issue. His first name is Lee, according to the letter column where all letters begin, "Dear Lee." His address is 101 Wagner St., Savannah, Georgia. But — Lee what? But it's a good fanzine. Poem by Gerry de la Ree, and interesting article on how to waterproof a fanzine, by J. Blyler, Esq., artwork by Ralph Rayburn Phillips and Walt Kessel, and several unusually good short fantasies.

* * *

INCINERATIONS: published quarterly by the Grape Press, 9109 S.W. Oloson Road, Portland 19, Oregon by R. Newbury. Seance and Unsanity is the lead "article", and discusses dianetics and the new science of diacybersemnetimantics which is either the overalls or the chowder. Take your pick, Mrs. Murphy. Ten cents a copy.

* * *

THE TALISMAN: 20c; Roy W. Loan, Jr., P.O. Box 3224, Columbia Heights Station, Washington 10, D.C.. No artwork, 20 pages of mimeography containing four articles, by Seabury Quinn, Philip N. Bridges, Phil Rasch, and D. R. Smith. Quinn's article, "On Science Fiction and the Weird" should be read by all aspirants to the title of writer.

* * *

PROCYON: First issue! Wallace Shore, Box 1565, Billings, Montana. No price listed. This is a printed zine on newsprint paper. Rick Sneyary has an interesting discussion on "Time Travel, Is It Possible?" "Ode For the Love of a Louse" by Bob Norton finds reprint (I think), since I remember seeing it before. It's worth reprinting. Wally seems to be having some real fun with his printing experiment. Maybe he can work it into a top flight fanzine.

* * *

WESTERN STAR: California's science fiction newsletter, no price listed. Jim Kepner, 1534 Grant Ave., San Francisco 11, Calif.. It takes a few pokes at L. Ron Hubbard's claims for dianetics that seem quite legitimate.

* * *

SPACESHIP: 10c, 3/25c; Bob Silverberg and Saul Diskin, 760 Montgomery St. Brooklyn 13, N.Y.. Standard size now. There's a very intelligent discussion of the feuding going on among the New York fan clubs. Also several short stories and articles.

* * *

OPERATION FANTASY: Capt. K. F. Slater, 13 G.P.R.P.C., B.A.O.R., 23, c/o G.P.O., England. Now a printed zine may be obtained in the U.S.A. by sending 15c to Philip J. Rasch, 715 W. 112th St., Los Angeles 44, Calif.. A thoroughly rounded zine put together by Ken and Joyce Slater, containing articles and reviews.

* * *

SCIENCE AND STF REVIEW: 15c, free to members of the American Science-Fantasy Society, Calvin Beck, 7312 Blvd. East, North Bergen, New Jersey. Ten pages of closely run-together material and editorial comments. In comparison to all other fanzines I've seen fifteen cents quite a steep price. Perhaps Mr. Beck should subscribe to a few of them and see...

* * *

GARGOYLE: no price listed. Michael DeAngelo, 1526 E. 23rd St., Brooklyn, N.Y.. Material in this first issue is reprints of things owned by Arkham House, but Mike wants original material. Send for a copy of this zine.

EXPLORER: 10c; Ed Noble, Jr., Box 49, Girard, Penna. Ed writes a letter which is practically a review of his zine, and tells better than I could what to expect. And his apology for writing a satire on one of my stories is most unnecessary. I enjoyed it immensely.

Rog Phillips
The Club-House
Estimable one, greetings—

Many profound thanks for the review which you gave **EXPLORER** in the November issue—and even more thanks for the comments about the efforts of the fan-mag editors and publishers.

The first plug which we received through **AMAZING** brought many requests, and almost all of them eventually became members of **ISFCC**—the combined state-side and international membership takes **ISFCC** well over the hundred mark, and they all seem to be in the active category.

Being in the business (?) of putting out a zine, I get in contact with a lot of the various efforts that are put out, and they range from off-set jobs to mimeo'd affairs such as is **EXPLORER**. Some are beautifully done, but plastered with ads which make the effort self-sustaining even to the point of profit.

Your treatment of **EXP** and such in Club-House maketh me regretful of writing **ALL GOD'S CHILLUN GOT WORLDS**, a take-off on **WORLDS WITHIN**—a part of the Pritchard Littlechip series for Paul Ganley's Fan-Fare. The Inca becomes Inca Dinka Dhu and the beings of cold and force become the Ghost-Riders led by Vojjin Munroh—

Very little of **EXPLORER** is of my own writing—the review of **WORLDS WITHIN** was done by Allen Newton of Baltimore—the serial we run is done by a statistician for one of the utilities of the state.

How does one get into being a fan-zine publisher? I sorta fell into it—I knew a guy who had a mimeograph—**ISFCC** needed a way to have **EXPLORER** published—I volunteered and now I have my own mimeo—odd job work has already paid for it.

It's a job—it takes a lot of time, but reviews such as are given in Club-House make the whole thing worthwhile. Once again, many thanks—

Sincerely,
Ed. Noble, Jr.

* * *

SCIENCE-FANTASY REPORT CARD: 15c; quarterly, W.N. Austin, 3317 W. 67th St., Seattle 7, Wash. Commissioned by the Nameless Ones (Seattle Science-Fantasy Society, 3200 Harvard N., Seattle 2, Wash.). This zine is something really worthwhile in fan effort. It's an attempt to actually

rate stories, magazines, and authors. Here are some general statistics. The average fan buys 8.2 different promags and has 2.5 favorite ones. That's only from 59 returns, but it's a good try. On the several hundred attempts at classification of stories in all the promags and rating according to quality a remarkably sane grading was attained. More of this kind of effort would be a really valuable fan project.

* * *

SEETEE: 10c; Official publication of Telurian Sciencefictioneers. If you want to join the fictioneers you can get twelve issues plus all club privileges for fifty cents. It's a small pocket size zine, mimeographed, thirty pages if and when they have enough material. Thirty-two members in this growing group.

TORQUASIAN TIMES: 20c; 1041 Cayman St., Santa Cruz, Calif. A heavy paper green cover with a Wilcox bem, and 20 large pages. The editor says he started out to emulate the Rhodomagnetic Digest but "occasionally found it necessary to stray from those high standards." There's a Ray Bradbury short story, "Bonfire," for a starter. And the Mother Goose tales rewritten... This is a first issue. R. Hewitt Reneau and Walt Sauers have put together a zine to be proud of. I hope enough of you got it or send for it to coax them into bringing out another issue.

* * *

CATACLYSM: an (ugh) poetry zine. (It would be just like a bunch of you to get this just to spite me, since I don't like other people's poetry—would you like to hear some of mine (pant pant)?) But, fortunately for the zine, Del Close sends his own review, which goes, "published approximately six times a year by Del Close at 1726 Poyntz, Manhattan, Kansas. Editors: Bob Briney and Del Close. Art Director: Jim Bradley. Send all subscriptions and personal messages, etc., to Del Close at the above address, send all poems etc. to Bob Briney at 561 W. Western Ave., Muskegon, Mich., and all art work, preferably ½ paper size to Jim Bradley, 545 N.E. San Rafael St., Portland, Ore.. Catclysm contains poems. Good poems by FAN poets. Anything to add, Mr. Phillips? If not, consider this the review." I'll add this: the poetry in this zine is good. In my opinion the best poem in the issue is "On Reading Lovecraft," by Andrew Duane.

* * *

THE CRICKET: Nov., vol. 1, no. 4; no price listed. Published spasmodically by Betsy and Ed Curtis at their editorial of-

fices, mimeograph salon, studio, dishwashing and ironing parlors, nursery, and residence, 201 Veterans Village, Canton, New York. That presents a nice word picture, and the zine is a very homey one, making you feel you are listening to them in their own parlor as you read it. It starts out with an editorial, and the editorial continues as a lieurely chat throughout the entire contents, discussing various classic concepts of what the future world of man will consist of. The theme is, "What is your concept of the daily life of the average man of the next century?" And the subject is discussed with intelligence and a mixture of seriousness and smooth humor. A treasure of a zine. Enclose a stamp if you send for it. Please. That's me, Rog Phillips, asking that.

* * *

COLLECTOR: Combined with DAWN: 10c; Nov. 1950; Russell Watkins and Bill Wentworth, 203 Wampum Ave., Louisville 9, Ky.. The "fanzine from Kentucky" has shortened from regalength pages to standard length. First article is about book prices and contents, by Bob Tucker, and is a general discussion of why fantasy books cost so much. Then comes book reviews, and Dawn's letter department, the only successful letterzine in fandom at present.

* * *

ETAOIN SHRDLU: 10c, 3/25c; Fall '50, vol. 2, no. 1; Stephen Taller, 40 West 77th St., Apt. 2F, New York 24, N.Y.. Published by the Mid Manhattan Science Fiction Society. Heavy paper cover, 27 full size pages. One story, "Hibernation" by Selwyn Rosenthal. Several articles, the best by far being one by Henry Kuttner on cliches.

* * *

FANVARIETY: 10c; W. Max Keasler, 420 S. 11th St., Poplar Bluff, Mo.. Cover by Rotsler and plenty of humorous inside illos, the whole zine looking more like the classic zines such as the now defunct Spacewarp. Gives me a nostalgic feeling. Such titles as "How to Tell a Poisonous Serpent", "Who is the Night's Prime Evil?", etc.... Ahhhh. Get it. You'll enjoy every page.

* * *

BIZARRE: 3/25c; Tom Covington, 315 Dawson St., Wilmington, N. C.. Four excellent short stories plus one verse and some regular departments. Nicest idea is

"The Psychiatrist's Nightmare", a story by Mike Phillips. Fifteen pages.

BABEL: a free newszine published by the Terran Society for their own fun?, the Nameless Ones, and other allied parties. T. Daniel and Paul Major, 415 Simpson Ave., Aberdeen, Washington. They have a nice department, a who's who of West Coast fans. You write your own word picture of yourself and your interests and send it to them and they publish it. A good way to get acquainted and to get to know a lot of fans.

* * *

RHODOMAGNETIC DIGEST: 25c and worth it; George Finigan, secretary, 2524 Telegraph Ave., Berkeley 4, Calif.. A joint effort of the fan club known as the Elves, Gnomes, and Little Men's Science Fiction, Chowder, and Marching Society. Forty-four pages, either printed or photo-offset, I don't know which, with two color work, all excellently done. Donald Baker Moore in his "On the Newstand" gripes about the poor quality of stories appearing. Most of his points seem well taken. Good thing his opinions aren't universal though... This is probably the best fanzine, from the publishing angle, in the crop.

* * *

There are two cardzines and two one-sheet newszines in this month's crop. They are:

STEEFCARD; Walter A. Coslet, Box 6, Helena, Montana.

SCIENCE FICTION DAILY; New Enterprise, Box 83, Gravesend Sta., Brooklyn 23, N.Y.. A cardzine.

WYLDE STAR NEWSHEET: R. J. Banks, Jr., 111 So. 15th St., Corsicana, Texas.

S-F NEWSCOPE; a newssheet, Lawrence R. Campbell, 43 Tremont St., Malden 48, Mass..

All four of these are brief, chatty, and full of current news. If you want one to see what it's like send a nickel in stamps.

* * *

That's all for this time. I've finally caught up on my reviewing. You know, if new fanzines keep appearing as fast as they did this month I'll be swamped! But when I think of the fun all these fan editors have at publishing all I can say is, I wish you'd subscribe to all of them and give them a boost. Not only the faneds, but the fan writers.

—Rog Phillips

You hailed his "Forgotten Worlds" as an all-time classic!
So you can't afford to miss Lawrence Chandler's new story:

PLANET OF NO RETURN

In the May AMAZING STORIES, on sale March 9, at your news dealer

The Reader's FORUM



LETTER OF THE MONTH

Dear Mr. Browne:

First of all, when I saw the new AMAZING on the stands I almost fainted, and then I saw the new FANTASTIC, and I thought to myself—I just can't believe my eyes. The thing(s) that caused this great sensation was the covers. They were without a doubt the best, the very, very best covers I have ever, ever seen on any sf mag. I must say they were magnificent! It was wonderful seeing an sf mag with toned down and dark covers without nude or semi-nude women, and actually I bought the mags just because of the covers.

When I got them home and looked inside I was doubly pleased. The stories are the best you've ever run, and I enjoyed the shorts in AMAZING so well that it prompted this letter (first one to you). I haven't had the time to read the novel or novelettes yet, but I'm actually looking forward to reading them.

Now to the question of what an sf fan is:

My personal viewpoint is that there are a great number of real, honest-to-goodness fans who never write letters to the editor and never even read the letter column. I think so because I know a lot of sf fans like that. They read sf because they like the stories. They never think of rating the stories to their enjoyment, but just read them and even forget them. They would never think of joining a fan club and would never write a letter to the mag unless it was a subscription. I, myself, have been a fan like that for a long time, but recently have joined a fan club and have taken to writing letters to editors. But I'm still not to the point of rating stories except to say one was terrific or another was lousy. From my own standpoint I'd say that your author friend was right when he said that the average reader doesn't care or know it if there are any holes in the author's scientific theories, and would be bored if you told him so. I wouldn't care and maybe not know it, but I wouldn't be bored if someone pointed it out to me in terms I could understand.

But from my own observation, a good many fans *do* know and *do* care about

those holes—to many people those holes mar the enjoyment of the story, and they tell the author so because they know all about those things, or think they do. So I can sum up this letter by saying that many fans never write letters, join clubs, or go to conventions, but they *must* in every sense be called fans because they enjoy science-fiction just as much as the ones who do those things and possibly even more, and after all, they *do* buy the mags.

Keep those covers as good as they are, and keep the stories as good and you'll never have to worry about having readers.

And one more thing I think the fans would be interested in hearing about any holes in any author's stories because they *are* interested (to some degree) in science, and the advancement of science, or else they would be reading love or detective stories or something else in a completely different vein.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not suggesting that some great scientific mind write in and tell us that so-and-so was wrong when he said it would take 9 days to circle the moon because H^2O and XYZ are equal to QVW and a ratio of 8 equals XY, so ZQV equals $9.81689 \frac{1}{2}$ or something to that effect. I'm saying that if someone told us that the earth was flat, the readers would know it was fantasy (or possibly so).

Myself, I take the fiction part of science fiction to heart, and if some author says the world is square or flat, I believe that the world is square or flat in his story—and in his story only—and if some writer wants the moon to be green cheese, then let it be green cheese because it is fiction, not science-fact. To those readers who like their reading matter to be precise then there are periodicals of science-fact for them to read, not purely imaginative fiction.

I know I'm contradicting myself, so no one knows what I'm saying or mean (even myself), but the fans are interested in hearing things, and again, are not. To put it more simply, if someone *told* them why they would listen with great inten-

sity, but if someone wrote in and told them they wouldn't bother reading it—maybe some of the fans can help me on that item—how about it you letter-writing fans—do you agree?

Yvonne K. Worth
302 S. Highland Ave.
Aurora, Illinois

Nice going, Yvonne—only please don't use that tone of voice when mentioning detective stories! Honestly, you have no idea how excellent some of them can be.
—Ed.

"AT THE TOP!"

Dear Editor:

Concerning your very interesting editorial in the November issue of AMAZING, I am inclined to agree almost completely with Mr. Hamling. Although I only recently discovered the field of science fiction, I do, on occasion, write letters to the Editor. However, I have never attended a science fiction convention, nor have I joined a fan club.

I read magazines such as and including AMAZING STORIES because of my interest in science, because of their rather high literary value and because you might call it a good form of escapist reading.

Incidentally, I, too, am in favor of keeping the cover and interior illustrations free from sex. You may count my vote with the "let's-keep-'em-covered" faction.

I am also in favor of fact articles exclusively.

AMAZING seems to be right up at the top in its field; continue the good work and keep it there.

F. Lee Jacquette
145 Shoreview Road
Manhasset, L.I., N.Y.

A breakdown of fan letters over the past year indicates that: covers should be anything but unvarying; stories should have a basis in solid science, but should concern people and personal problems; that no story has ever been published that everybody liked or everybody detested. What do we do now?
—Ed.

NO HERMITS NEED APPLY!

Dear Ed:

I just finished the Nov. issue of AMAZING, also the reader's section. I've never written in before, so I have plenty to say now.

First, what's all the fuss about sexy stories for? I don't get it. What's the matter with your readers? Are they hermits? Don't they know that love and stuff does happen? Do they think that because the characters are in space ships, on some far planet or in the future that human beings are going to stop having human instincts?

Personally, I think a certain amount of

that sort of stuff is necessary to make the characters seem real. Oh, not too much, of course. For instance, I thought "Brothers Under the Skin" had too much. In fact, it was just an overripe love story with a few BEM'S added.

I thought "All Heroes Are Hated" was a wonderful story in every way. Keith Kenton was a superb character. Too many of the heroes in sf are like gods instead of humans.

I liked "Who's That Knocking At My Door" very much. Hope it wasn't too mushy for some of your more intellectual readers. Maybe Mr. Tenneshaw should have had the guy bump off his wife the first time he tried. After all, what's a wife or two.

I liked all stories except "One of Our Planets Is Missing" and "Devil In a Box". I couldn't even finish those.

"The Day the Bombs Fell" was terrific and very frightening.

About your argument in the Observatory, Ed—I think your author friend was right in every way. I know quite a few people who read sf and who don't go to conventions or belong to fan clubs or write letters to the Editor. I don't care particularly about lengthy scientific explanations either. Although I don't like them without them completely, I sort of like a happy medium.

Mrs. Ruth Darough
7420 Grand River
Detroit 4, Michigan

Thank you, Mrs. Darough!

—Ed.

THE RIGHT REPUTATION

Dear Mr. Browne:

As a casual reader of AMAZING, (I don't buy it regularly) I thought I would tell you why I bought the November copy.

I always look thru the mags when they first appear on the stands, and buy some of them "sight unseen", or on their reputations, as you might say. Of those I look thru, AMAZING rates high. I notice that I more and more often buy it too. This time, it was the implications of the illustration with Robert Moore Williams "World of Reluctant Virgins". This is the kind I like.

What clinched the bargain was Krupa's drawing for "One of Our Planets Is Missing" by Mack Reynolds. The title is quite catchy, too. I have been reading sf since 1935. Reynolds' story is something like the old "thought-variant" type of 1935 to 1937 era in ASTOUNDING. This story is in first place, Williams' yarn is second, while "The Devil In A Box" is third. I always liked stories of the Caribbean Islands and the Voodoo down there, so "The Devil In A Box" turned out swell. Might have been more at home in Fantastic Adventures.

"The Day The Bomb Fell" is fourth. We have all heard the whispering of jet

planes, and the part where Johnny heard them over the schoolyard was realistic. His teacher's nervousness was quite natural, too. Psychologically, I don't think Crouch depicted a little boy's reactions correctly. They were too indifferent.

The other three yarns are bunched for last place. As long as Williams has been at it, I should think he would know that a lunar afternoon is several Earth days in length. His Earth-like description on page 62 of the lunar afternoon reads, "To the right, the sun was sinking behind high mountains." This is not quite right. "Suspended" rather than "sinking" would better describe the sensation of seeing the sun from the moon. Swiatek's illo with this story was incorrect. All his men are drawn alike. Hobbin should be showing his age, the background should look like the moon. Sharp's drawing for Tennesse's story is better fitted. The cover, though good, loses all its punch when one realizes it is part symbolic, (the hand bearing humankind from deep space) and part pure sensationalism (the exploding ship in the palm). At least, you have no beams or fens on it.

Bob Earnett
1107 Lyon
Carthage, Missouri

Robert Moore Williams, upon reading your comments about the length of a lunar afternoon, was last seen sinking rapidly in the west.... We thought Leslie Crouch caught the boy's reactions in "The Day the Bomb Fell", perfectly. Children at that age can be mighty indifferent to some of the things adults do—and with reason! Too, when things really got rough, the boy was pretty badly dazed by what was going on around him. —Ed.

WE CAN'T ESCAPE!

Dear Ed:

Your answer to Howard Sorey's letter (December, page 151) might cause many readers to assume that some disappointed author has put a few holes in your head.

"Escape velocity"—as everybody but a few sf authors and editors knows, is the initial velocity which would be required to fire a projectile from the earth so that it would not fall back. Neglecting air resistance, this velocity is approximately seven miles per second (not to be confused with seven g's thrust). The force of gravity acting between any two objects, say earth and a space ship, varies inversely as the square of the distance between them. A rocket which could produce a thrust of one g for a long enough time could, once started, travel to the moon at less than one mile per hour. One ounce additional thrust would start it.

C. F. Woolley, Jr.
2265 Eudora St.
Denver, Colorado

"PRETTY GOOD ..."

Dear Sir:

I have for the past two years been wanting to write in and tell you how I feel about your magazine.

On the whole it is pretty good and I get a great deal of enjoyment out of it. Your ideas on how you're planning to fix up the magazine appear to be pretty good and I hope it turns out that way.

I have just finished reading the August issue; the stories were all very good.

Please publish this as I wish to find out from your readers which ones would be willing to sell me some back issues.

Barbara Clark
2320 Kings Highway
Brooklyn 20, New York

We trust this will get you the back issues you want, Barbara. And we think you'll find some pretty good stories coming up in these pages during the next few months. —Ed.

BARGAIN DAY AT RIVER EDGE

Dear Mr. Browne:

Realizing that many of your readers are continually seeking back issues of your magazine in an effort to complete collections or obtain stories they're interested in reading, I'd like to announce that I have quite a large collection of AMAZING STORIES that I'm interested in selling or trading for sf magazines.

Included in this group are about 80% of all the Ziff-Davis published AMAZINGS, starting in 1938 and running through to the present. There are also some scattered issues of the early AMAZING, such as five from 1926, two from 1927, two from 1928, etc. The majority of the mags are in good to excellent condition.

I also have a number of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES in good shape to dispose of, starting with the June, 1940 issue and including about 75% of the issues published since then.

I believe this may be of service to some of your readers. But remember, it's a matter of first come, first served.

Gerry de la Ree
277 Howland Avenue
River Edge, New Jersey

Those of our readers who have been asking about back issues now have the answer. Good hunting! —Ed.

ABOUT THAT "GRAVITY IS A RUBBER BAND"

Dear Sir:

I seldom find time to write to the editor of any of the several magazines I manage to read each month. However, after Mr. Sorey's letter in the December issue of AMAZING I had to break my silence.

The subject he discussed in his letter is one that has bothered me for a long time, but I now know the answer. Apparently, whoever wrote the answer to Mr. Sorey's query did not take the trouble to learn just what this escape velocity business is all about; the editorial comment "Look on gravity as a rubber band, attached to a space ship. Any movement away from earth will take up the slack in the band and gradually stretch it to its point of greatest resistance..." is a completely fallacious analogy, since the force acting on a space ship as it proceeds into space becomes less!

Actually, Mr. Sorey stated the answer to the question of escape velocity in the fourth paragraph of his letter; namely, that a seven-miles-per-second velocity is necessary only if the space ship is considered as a projectile that receives an initial thrust only. The present day limitations of rocket fuels, limitations that may be with us for many years, simply do not allow us to build a space ship that can allow a continuous application of motive power for the entire trip. If we had sufficiently powerful fuels, it would be quite possible to leave the earth's surface at a velocity of seven-miles-per-hour and get to the Moon, or to any of the planets. But this would require a tremendous expenditure of fuel.

As mentioned above, the writer puzzled over the idea of escape velocity for quite some time. One night in a class in differential equations (I am an evening engineering student at N.Y.U.), the answer came in a sample problem. The problem in question was, "With what terminal velocity would an object strike the surface of the earth if it fell from an infinite distance?" The answer, when worked out mathematically, turns out to be seven-miles-per-second! And, this velocity is independent of the mass of the object. Now reverse the procedure. What velocity would have to be imparted to an object fired directly out into space from the surface of the earth in order for it to continue on to infinity? The answer again is seven-miles-per-second!

Why infinity? Simply because the force of gravity acting on any object decreases as the square of the distance from the earth. When this distance is infinite, the gravitational pull reduces to zero, or we have escaped the earth's gravitational field. This is the mathematical answer. In practical terms, an infinite distance is not necessary since the gravitational force decreases as the square of the distance. Hence, a distance of several million miles would suffice to reduce the force of gravity to an almost negligible percentage of what it is at the earth's surface.

After I had found the answer to my question concerning escape velocity, I proceeded to put together a little article that

might clear up some of the misconceptions that exist. I sent a resume of the article to AMAZING STORIES, and, of course, received a polite answer to the effect that it probably would not be of any interest to readers of AMAZING. It appears now that I should have sent you a copy of the article itself; even if you did not publish it, at least you could have given Mr. Sorey a correct answer to his question. I am rectifying that error on my part as of now; enclosed you will find a copy of my article, complete with an Appendix containing the mathematical derivations necessary for calculating the value of escape velocity for earth.

I suggest that if "Ye Editor" has no use for it that he forward it to Mr. Sorey who might be able to make some sense out of it. For a discussion of the fuel problem as related to rocket ships, and a good insight into this escape velocity question, I would highly recommend Willy Ley's "The Conquest of Space"—good reading for you too, Mr. Editor.

Roy B. Reisch
28-12 24th Ave.
Long Island City 2, N.Y.

If the technical-minded among our readers want to quarrel with Roy on his conceptions of gravity and escape velocity, these columns are the proper battleground. As explained last month, we got into the act, as an experiment, and had several pairs of shoes planted firmly on our neck!... We own—and have read—Mr. Ley's "Conquest of Space" and found it only slightly less fascinating than a good detective story! —Ed.

WHO THREW THAT SCIENTIFIC FACT?

Sirs:

Re your editorial in the November issue. I can only speak from my experience with sf fans, and the ones I know fit the specifications set down by your unnamed author so well I find I must agree with him. I'm referring to the usual fan and not the type of reader who delves into J. M. Campbell's magazine exclusively. I recently attended some sort of a fan club gathering in Newark, N.J., and there was a whole pot load of fans there including some nationally-known ones. I doubt if there were five people there (including myself) who would recognize a scientific fact if it hit them in the face, much less possess any scientific training. The majority were ordinary, not too well educated, informal people who are a carryover from (and would feel much more at home in) the weird and fantasy fields. Incidentally, I'm not trying to be snobbish in making those statements; I'm only trying to answer your query as honestly as I can and as I see it. The fact that I possess a science degree is incidental. Possibly the best proof the statements of your anyony-

mous author might have is the number of sf magazines on the market now.

How many of them print good sf or even sf? Not fantasy or fantasy sf or pseudo-sf, but sf.

Louis Ellfazzolb

We know of at least two such magazines, Louis—and we'll name them if you insist!

—Ed.

Dear Sir:

Your answer to Howard Sorey's question concerning escape velocity appears to me to be irrelevant as well as untrue. He asked about a velocity, you answered in terms of G, which you refer to as a force, speed and acceleration. It can be a force or the acceleration due to that force but not the speed to which he refers.

My conception of the matter is this. It is perfectly true that a rocket could go to the moon or anywhere else at less than escape velocity if it had an unlimited supply of fuel. Actually, all of the fuel that is carried must be accelerated and the more you get rid of early, the less you have to accelerate later. Therefore, rockets are planned to use their fuel rapidly and then drift unpowered to their destination.

As for the acceleration, it doesn't matter whether you accelerate at 2G or 20. Sooner or later you will reach 7 miles per second. The acceleration used will be a compromise between the fuel supply and the comfort of any passengers.

Donald R. Osgood
827 W. Jefferson St.
Tallahassee, Florida

Roy Reisch's letter, immediately preceding yours, pretty well exhausts the subject along his lines of reasoning. If there's any dissenters, you'll find their letters in the Forum in future issues. —Ed.

THE MAN WITH THE MONEY

Dear Sir:

Your visitor was so right and your Mr. Hamling so wrong.

The bulk of your readers are bored people who get a thrill out of the other fellow's imagination. Whether the story stands up to scientific data or not, doesn't worry them in the least because they

were seeking an avenue of escape from the humdrum. These people don't write letters to the editor—nor do they bother with clubs or conventions—for mostly they are busy people and wedge a fantastic story into their existence as a spare time relaxation. The two men of my family like the story "My World Ended Tonight" best, and we have been buying and reading these for ages. The story they remember best and liked the most was the most impossible according to your present scientific research. Hmmm, seems to me that a good story is one that touches the hidden emotions. We get an awful lot of atom dope in the daily news. I'll bet "Three Waltzing Mice" could be having fun!

Also, sheer nonsense is what atomic energy, rocket propulsion and radar, etc. were when I was so high to a long-eared rabbit. Anything new is nonsense until it has become a reality. Remember? Consider the lie detector and a possible mind-reading machine, telepathy. I like them "out of this world", otherwise I'd buy a true detective and get facts. Cold, hard, murderous facts! No thanks. Give me the goddess from another world who inspired the fresh, know-it-all students. The picture "Destination Moon" was a wonder but it had no beginning, no second act, no end. We live that sort of thing. Why should we take time off to see it verified in so remote a spot as the moon?

This is my first letter and will probably be my last, but I still say your managing editor should know where the mags go and who reads them and why. The customer is often wrong, but he's still the paymaster.

(Name withheld)

10,000,000 TO ONE!

Dear Mr. Browne:

For a number of years I have been reading every issue of AMAZING as it came out. For all these years I have been reading many of the letters sent in by other sf fans like myself. I never have attempted to write one myself, and I don't imagine it has a chance in ten million of being published, but I thought I'd try anyhow.

Brain machines are getting overworked also, yet "...Divided We Fall" had a new twist that I rather enjoyed. In fact, I think it was the best story in the December issue. "Bathe Your Bearings in Blood" was not too bad, except it was a little corny. I rate the stories as follows:

1. "Divided We Fall"
2. "Vengeance of the Golden God"
3. "Kiss and Kill"
4. "Your number Is Up"
5. "Bathe Your Bearings in Blood"

Joseph W. Berlinger
1125 Park Avenue
New York 28, New York

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THE MARTIAN ROCKET

By MERRITT LINN

THE VAST tungsten and uranium mines on the Moon have given rise to a number of cities, but the five major ones are on the Earthward side. There is a domed observatory in the twilight zone, but it only houses a few people. The one city on the "Other Side" (as it's called) is Caxton, a domed beauty of steel, aluminum and quartz, shining like a jewel against velvet, in its somber setting against the bleak Lunar terrain.

Why Diane and I picked the place for a honeymoon jaunt, only honeymooners will ever know. Even at that, with all the traditional honeymooners' desire for privacy, very few rent a shuttle rocket and visit Caxton. The city is an out of the way place doing a little mining, offering a bit of recreation, but mostly leaving you to your own devices. Diane and I liked that. We were a bit fed up with all the romantic hoop-la of Lunar City and Craterdorf. Night-clubbing under the transparent domes palls after a while even though at first it's the most magnificent sight a couple can see.

We'd gotten up late that day (naturally) when Diane suddenly suggested a jaunt.

"Come on, darling," she said, "let's get a rocket and go a thousand miles from here. Let's walk alone under the stars."

The zippone was still a little heavy in my brain, but when Diane looked at me with those half-closed, "please, honey?" eyes, I put my arms around her and said, "If you want to, dear, that's good enough for me. I want to, too."

We picked up a thirty meter shuttle rocket at the Airlock, with space suits and provisions and in a few minutes we were slithering low across the barren landscape.

I put the rocket down two hours later and a thousand miles from Caxton. The spot we selected was near a rather jagged mass of mountainous rock and had a wild fearsome appearance as if it had been the site of some past cataclysm—which in all probability, it had. We slipped into suits and started a casual walk—or bounce—under the delightful sense of airiness that one-sixth gravity can give you.

We'd gone a few hundred meters from the ship into a series of pillar like rocks jutting into the sky when Diane, who was lagging a bit called my attention to a cavernous opening in the side of a small mountain. Caves are a rarity on Luna. I ran to her side where she was pointing at the cavern's mouth.

"Game, honey?" I asked. "Want to take a look?"

Her voice was throaty over the phones: "Of course, Jerry. You'd have missed it anyway. Why do you think I caught it?"

We hadn't gone twenty meters into the

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cave when we sighted the other end. And at the end of the little cave was an incredible opening! We were standing on what amounted to an enormous cliff, the side of a gigantic natural cavern in the heart of the satellite. But that wasn't what stunned us as we stepped back a minute to get a better look at the same time thoroughly concealing ourselves.

The cavern floor was a mass of laboring creatures, and from their skeletal structure, it was easy to tell they were Martians in spite of their suits! They were working like bees and the structure they were erecting was obvious. The floor was strewn with vast amounts of tools and equipment and far across the other side of the cave we could see jet-black fans whose letters, incidentally, I caught rockets coming in with more loads of materials. And from the center of the floor rose four massive cylindrical tubes that no stretch of the imagination could conceive as anything but what—as it turned out later—they were—monstrous rocket tubes!

We didn't stay but a second long. We shot back to our little shuttle rocket and were back in Caxton so fast we almost heated the craft against Luna's nebulous residual gases!

The rest is anti-climatic. The story of how the Martians were making the Moon a gigantic projectile to hurl against the mass of the mother planet is too well known. The League of Zixxus, that fanatic band of die-hards, refusing to accept the defeat inflicted on them thirty years ago had been working in secret ever since, and the incredible rocket motor for Luna was the result. It is hard to imagine the size of the proposed engines now that they've been destroyed by the fast-acting patrol, but scientists are fully aware that there was enough energy available in the equipment to move the Moon's tremendous mass, and send it hurtling from its orbit into the placidity of the green planet beneath it.

Diane and I often have occasion to talk about our honeymoon! If sheer chance hadn't hit us between the eyes, there'd have been no honeymoons for anyone!—any more!

GOOD NEWS!

By JOHN WESTON

WITH LONG stories of how the United States must import so many things vital to it such as vanadium, chromium and tin, it is a pleasure to report that this country is starting to produce the bulk of theuranium it consumes! Up until very recently the Belgian Congo has been the major source of uranium, followed closely by Canada.

But the stimulation the government has given to private prospectors along with lavish governmental hunts, has produced sizable deposits of moderately high-grade ore. By no means has the country yet been covered, but certainly, there are vast amounts of inferior ores which can be worked successfully.

Uranium is critical, hence it is satisfying to know that we've got it.

The whole country is re-examining its position on major resources like this. Right now with the gigantic expansion in steel production, thirty and forty per cent deposits of iron ore are going to be worked. We have huge amounts of this stuff, not thought worthy of taking as long as we could go into the Mesabi Range and pull out the fifty per cent stuff. But times are changing and we're taking what's at hand.

We may have to use ersatz stuff for some things but in the really important matters we've got the real McCoy. In connection with the iron ore it's interesting to note that the United States is also opening up gigantic ore deposits in South America. The Americas considered as a total have resources which while not unlimited are indeed hard to exhaust especially in light of the fact that we're always pushing resources which are truly inexhaustible, resources such as aluminum and magnesium. Keep your eye on those metals. They're here to stay and then some!

SMOTHER THAT SMELL!

By JON BARRY

MODERN people are assailed by smells from all sides. "That book smells... that story stinks... that play's a stinker... that movie reeks..." they say endlessly. About those smells science can do nothing. But as far as the legitimate type, the kind which assail the nostrils, science is learning something. It is only recently that the scientific world has come to agree that odors or smells are essentially gases evaporating from substances and as such, while quite elusive, can be handled by conventional gas-handling techniques.

It has been known for a long time that ozone, an allotropic form of oxygen, with the molecular structure of three atoms of oxygen, has the unique property of attacking and destroying odors particularly those of an organic origin. Advantage has been taken of this property by using ozone to purify air. Until recently the general generation of ozone was by creating electrical sparks. Whenever a spark discharge occurs in air, ozone automatically appears. This is a rather noisy, messy inefficient way of doing things.

It is now announced that a bulb generator based on electronic principles is available. Plugged into an ordinary wall socket it provides surprisingly large quantities of ozone capable of destroying bacteria odors. One single bulb can purify the air in about a thousand cubic feet of space, that is to say, a room about ten by ten, by ten. There is wide use for these gadgets in refrigerating plants, clothing storage rooms and so on.

According to the latest reports however,

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science is still unable to cope with those other odors that have to do with artistic output—ozone can't do the job! Unless, of course, the authors are exposed to an extremely strong whiff of it...!

THE MENTAL NETWORK

By

A. T. KEDZIE

IN THE early years of *Amazing Stories* it published one or two stories about a method whereby ten or so human brains were linked together in a nutrient solution by some monstrous bio-chemist, who used them to further his schemes. The point of the story was that such a blending of powerful brains could think irresistibly, straight through to the solution of any problem. It was an interesting thesis indeed, and it is worthy of thinking about now, for science, it seems, is at an impasse.

It is a well recognized fact that no one man can know very much. Even the most brilliant brains can only specialize in one small given branch of their respective fields. About other subjects they can know only a superficial amount. Science has become so huge that it is even impossible to classify in libraries, the gigantic quantities of information and facts garnered by the researchers. As a result, science is like a huge helpless body, ever growing, but unable to direct itself with the methods at present available.

What is needed is some sort of unifying agent, some sort of grouping of brains from different fields to correlate and connect apparently isolated facts. It is a known fact that all branches of science are related. But the problem is to bring them together.

If any sort of hook-up of minds could be arranged, as in the s-f story mentioned previously science could take enormous strides. If say, a biologist, a physicist, a chemist, a mathematician, an astronomer, and a half dozen other scientists could have their minds fused into one, they would see any assigned problem in light of their common experience and with their enormous backgrounds to draw from, they could relate the parts to the whole. They could synthesize vast fields of scientific endeavor.

Naturally we can never expect any pseudo-biological hook-up. But with a growing knowledge of brain waves etc., perhaps some machine could be devised in which minds could link telepathically with each other temporarily, in order to solve universal problems. Such a "common-brain" helped by the electronic calculators, and working toward a common goal, could be well-nigh irresistible insofar as an attack on a scientific problem would go. The idea isn't as far-fetched as it seems—we may yet see the "super-brain"...



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